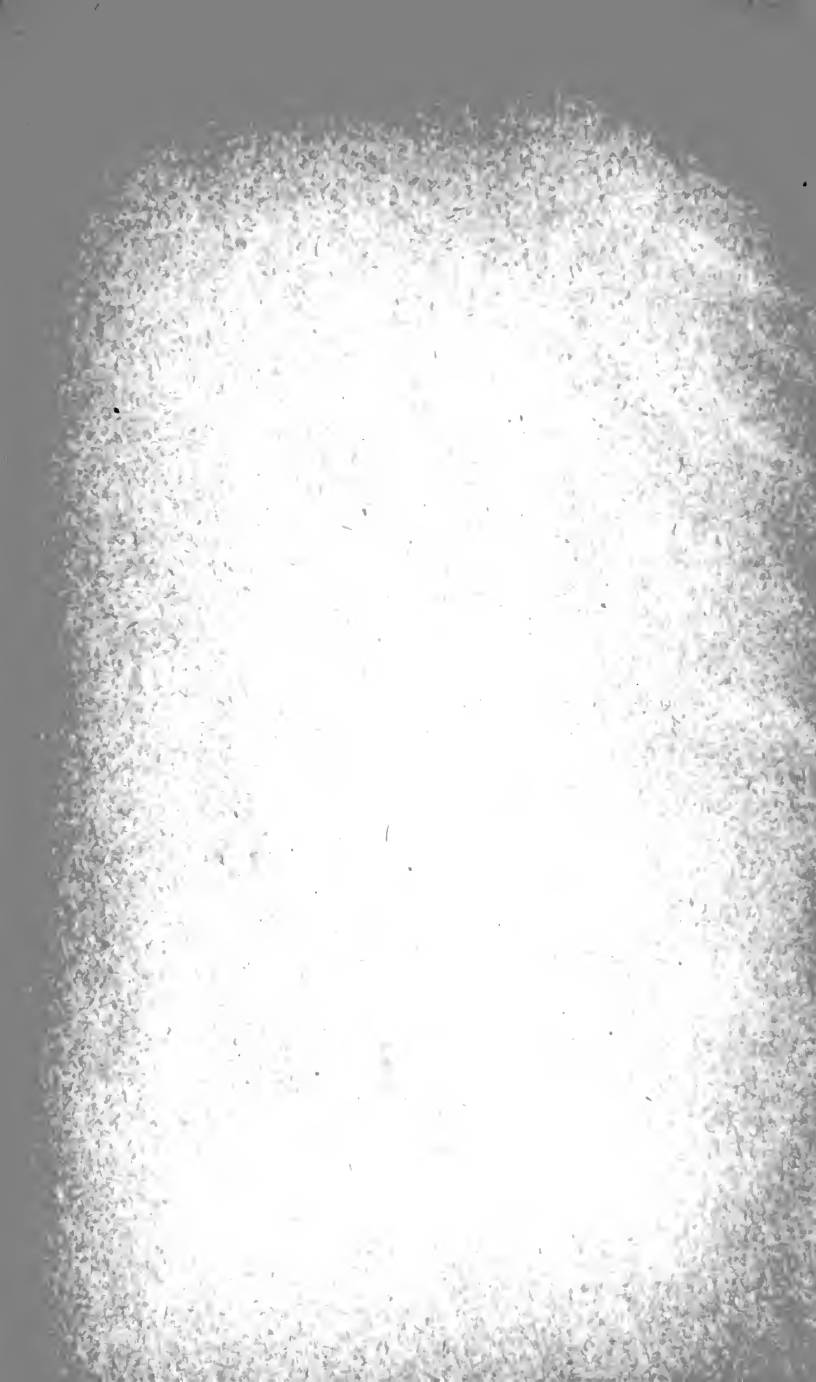


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# THE HOLY ESTATE

VOL. I.





# THE



# HOLY ESTATE

A Study in Morals

By

W H WILKINS

(W H de WINTON)

Author of "St Michael's Eve,"  
"The Forbidden Sacrifice", also  
part author of "The Green Bay Tree."

and


FRANK THATCHER.



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## AUTHORS' NOTE



*CHAPTERS II.-VI., VIII., XI.-XVI., and XVIII. are  
written by Captain THATCHER.*

*The rest of the Novel is written by Mr. W. H. WILKINS.*



# THE HOLY ESTATE.

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## CHAPTER I.

*Dearly beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God, and in the face of this congregation, to join together this Man and this Woman in holy Matrimony; which is an honourable estate, instituted of God in the time of man's innocency, signifying unto us the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and His Church; which holy estate Christ adorned and beautified with His presence, and first miracle that He wrought in Cana of Galilee; . . . . .*

The old priest's eyes lifted a moment from his book and fell upon the white-robed figure before him. His voice faltered a little; there was a sympathetic rustle among the congregation; he went on again,—

*and is commended of St. Paul to be honourable*

*among all men : and therefore is not by any to be enterprised, nor taken in hand, unadvisedly, lightly, or wantonly, to satisfy men's carnal lusts and appetites, like brute beasts that have no understanding ; but reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God ; duly considering the cause for which Matrimony was ordained.*

The congregation looked serenely unconscious. They were thinking of the dresses doubtless, or perhaps most of them did not understand this bald way of putting things, which anywhere but here would be considered unfit for ears polite. Yet it is as well that people should hear the truth sometimes—even in church.

But the truth often falls upon deaf ears ; and even when it does not, we are apt to apply it to our neighbours rather than to ourselves. It certainly fell upon deaf ears in the case of the bridegroom, Captain Wortley Dampier, as he stood there erect, with soldierly bearing, and clad in irreproachably-cut frock-coat. Captain Dampier's stock-in-trade was an admirable manner, more than a fair share of good looks, and a first-rate tailor. All the best goods were in the shop windows.

Getting married—if one hasn't done it before—

must be, to a certain extent, a new sensation. In Wortley Dampier's case—and he hadn't gone through the ceremony before—it was not by any means an unpleasant one. The woman whom, in a few minutes, he would call his wife, had a little money, and much beauty. Thus two potent passions in men of his type would be gratified.

The thought of these things made Captain Dampier feel quite virtuous. He repeated his vows unctuously. He had foresworn sack, and meant to live cleanly, at any rate until the flesh should move him to live uncleanly again. It is easy to form virtuous resolutions when things go smoothly; and since he had come Home from India on leave, things had gone very smoothly indeed with Captain Dampier. It was surely his lucky star which had guided him down to this far-away village on the rugged Cornish coast, and which had led him to cross the path of Madeleine Trevethy.

And since one person's good star is often another's evil one, Madeleine Trevethy had fallen in love with him. That clever devil, Opportunity, was on his side, and that evil angel, Circumstance, was on hers. Madeleine Trevethy was well past

twenty, and therefore of an age when a young woman is presumed to know her own mind. But of course she doesn't—who does? She was highly impressionable, very tired of her own narrow little world, and absolutely ignorant of the greater one outside it. Her father, the rector of Trevena, was a very babe in the world's wiles, and she had no other near relatives to warn her against men of Captain Dampier's type, a type which, however common it may be elsewhere, is not often found in an isolated Cornish village. It was the usual story: the girl was caught, fascinated by the man's glib tongue and good looks. She believed his vows of love and devotion, vows which were sworn by all eternity—an eternity which lasts until the next morning. She trusted him with the perfect trust of one who has never been deceived. She loved him, or thought she did, with a love which seemed sweeter than anything life had brought to her before or could ever bring again. The outward appearance of the man allured her, and for the nonce made her oblivious of anything else. It is easy for a young and healthy girl to imagine herself in love with a good-looking man. Adolescence and propinquity have a lot to do with these things.

Time being short, for his leave was nearly up and his needs pressing, Captain Dampier made fierce love, and urged an early marriage. There was no reasonable objection to it. The rector demurred a little at first, loth to part with the child of his old age ; but his whole life had been one of self-sacrifice, at one time to a peevish, invalid wife, and then to an ungrateful parish, so he nerved himself to this crowning act of renunciation. Only Mrs. Eveline, a friend and neighbour, who had been almost an elder sister to the motherless girl, ranged herself in active opposition. She did not like Captain Dampier. She was determined, she said, to know more about him ; but as he equally determined that she should know very little, she did not get much further. The fact that her dislike was instinctive and unreasoning made it all the stronger. People do not reason about likes and dislikes. If they were quite reasonable, they would probably have neither.

There was nothing definite to be urged against Captain Dampier. He was in the army, a fact which at least explains a man's existence, and if Mrs. Eveline wanted to know more of him or of his people, she had only to turn up the pages of

that interesting romance, "The Landed Gentry." As the world counts these things, he was an officer and a gentleman. Mrs. Eveline didn't know any of Captain Dampier's Indian friends. No man on whom he had palmed off a horse, no "pigeon" whom he had plucked at cards, no woman with whom he had had an intrigue—no one of these came across her path, and even if any had, what then? The world doesn't expect a certificate of moral worth from the men who marry; if it did, the marriage rate would become unprecedentedly low. It theoretically exacts one from the women, and doesn't always get it even then. Besides, Captain Dampier's people—cousins, he had no near relatives—quickened by the memory of sundry unpaid loans, were only too anxious to bear testimony to his virtues, and to draw a veil over his faults. "He is going to marry and settle down," said they, taking Rousseau's view that the sowing of wild oats is necessary in the life of man; "he will quite reform." A somewhat selfish view to take, since the reformation was a doubtful one, and the "settling down" involved the sacrifice of a maiden.

They knelt before God's altar, these two, and repeated the vows which make two one. She

with the holy awe which gathers around the most solemn moments of a woman's life; he as merely part of the business which had to be gone through.

Their right hands were joined, and the priest's voice rang out adown the church,—

*“Those whom God hath joined together, let no man put asunder.”*

Whom God hath joined! Was such a marriage of God's joining? To the bride it seemed so. Marriage was a sacrament to her, and everything was holy, mystic, wonderful. The fragrant breath of the lilies on the altar swept across her face. Something hurt her in her throat; she felt at the point of tears. Her father's voice, the chanting of the choir, seemed very far off; only her husband was near her now, to have and to hold, to love, cherish, and obey, until death should part them. There was more chanting, there were more prayers, an exhortation to which no one listened, kisses, congratulations, and the crashing chords of the wedding march. Then they passed from the crowded church to the brightness of the sunshine outside. Not a cloud was in the sky; the wide Atlantic, hard by, stretched away, sapphire blue, to

the distant horizon ; the air was joyous with the sound of marriage bells, which drowned the drowsy lapping of the sea on the cliffs beneath ; the pathway was strewn with flowers. It was like the last act of an Adelphi melodrama, or the concluding chapter of a three-volume novel, which treats of marriage as the end of all things, instead of the beginning of them.

There was a great gathering afterwards at the rectory, a rambling old house sheltered from the keen Atlantic blasts by the knotted branches of its wind-swept trees. Wedding breakfasts still hold good in North Cornwall. People who have a twenty miles' drive to a wedding expect to find something substantial to eat at the end of it. Madeleine Trevethy's wedding was an event in the annals of the country-side, and friends and neighbours came from far and near to wish her God-speed. At least, that is the conventional way of putting it. Most of them, probably, came to see the wedding, or to see one another, and to admire their own presents and the gowns.

There were the usual speeches—at least, they are unusual now—only two, one in which the old rector, with tears in his voice, proposed the health



of the wedded pair ; one in which Captain Dampier, brave and handsome, thanked the company in the name of his " dear wife " and himself for their good wishes, and assured the rector, in time-worn platitude, that he " had not lost a daughter but gained a son." People often gain very queer sons in this way, and daughters too, for the matter of that !

But the Cornish young ladies took Wortley Dampier seriously, and in their hearts envied Madeleine her handsome husband. It was the physical attraction of the man which appealed to them, as it had appealed to her. There is a tradition to the effect that women of quick wit and intelligence do not bestow their affections upon selfish and vicious men. But it is a tradition often broken, even by highly educated young women of advanced views, if only the object of their infatuation be sufficiently strong and good-looking. The phenomenon illustrates how large a share the senses play in the passion called love. Obviously any intelligent young woman would see through a sensual egoist as soon as she had an opportunity of really knowing him. But she seldom gets such an opportunity before marriage ; and after—what avails it ? She must needs balance her gained experience

against her lost illusion. The one is generally purchased at the price of the other. And marriage, we know, is a lottery in which each stakes something, and not unfrequently loses it after the manner of lotteries.

"Remember, if you ever want a friend, you have only to let me know," tearfully murmured Mrs. Eveline, as she embraced the bride, when the "going away" dress was donned.

Madeleine thanked her amiably, almost indifferently, as friends are thanked who thrust forward their most precious gifts at inopportune moments, and they went downstairs together. Below, there was much confusion and a crowd of people, a few tears and many embraces, a rain of rice and a roll of wheels. Then they were off. That chapter of the woman's life was closed for ever.

The village was soon left behind. The pair of well-stepping horses bore husband and wife swiftly over the moorland on the way to Launceston, where they were to catch the train to Exeter. Both were silent. He had nothing to say; her heart was too full for words. His eyes fell upon the little hand which was so close to his own; he raised it with an air of proprietorship to his lips.

At his mute caress her nerves quivered with a sensation wholly new; her face pulsed red, and then faded whitely. In her soul some new birth was in travail. She loved this man, and yet she trembled. She had entrusted her all to him. Her passionate ideals, the unspotted whiteness of her womanhood, the treasure of her love, her life's happiness—all were his, to cherish or to mar as he might please. Her love was voiceless. Ah! now he was about to speak. She lifted her mobile face to his, her red lips trembling, the waking wonder of her soul shining forth in her eyes.

"Thank goodness that is over!" said this husband of an hour, with a yawn of unfeigned relief. "Do you mind if I have a smoke?"

## CHAPTER II.

THERE are few ills in life without some compensating balance. The "cold weather season" in India is the compensating balance in Anglo-Indian life. It is the antidote that nature has provided as a set-off against the other eight months of punkahs, thermantidotes, iced drinks, and perpetual perspiration.

From the end of October until March, India is a delightful place to live in, especially in a large up-country cantonment. There are dances and race-meetings, dinners and picnics galore, and people wrap themselves up in furs in the chilly night air, and say, "Just fancy this in India!" Then, Hey presto! all changes. The heads of departments, with the secretariats, clerks, and office-boxes flee up to the Hills. The other portion of the Anglo-Indian world, who have not the good fortune to be heads of departments, secretaries, or clerks, don white clothing and thick pith hats. They lie about, panting, in broad verandahs, with blue "chicks" hanging round, and recline in long arm-chairs, with "peg"

tumblers on the arms thereof, and heavy white punkahs swinging over their heads. Outside, everything is brown and parched with heat and dust: not a breath of wind stirs in the blinding, palpitating glare. Everyone of these belated ones moves languidly about, cursing the wretched *punka-wallahs*, and sighing for the time when their two months privilege leave will come due, so that they too may rush up to the Hills, and live.

But now, at the time of which we write, it was the cold weather season, and Dustypore is one of the most charming places in India in the cold weather. It has a large garrison; a fine race-course (left handed); a comfortable club named after a distinguished general who was found thoroughly incompetent in the hour of need, but who was the best man in Upper India at concocting fancy drinks; a public garden with a covered band-stand; and a swimming bath.

Among the regiments that had the good fortune to be stationed in Dustypore was Her Majesty's 111th Regiment of Foot—more recently known as “Prince Heinrich Von Seidlitz's Own.” Most of the battles of bygone days, when soldiers were soldiers and soldiers fought, were embroidered on their

colours, from Minden to Sevastopol. The regiment had just returned from a Black Mountain expedition, covered with glory and laurels, with two men killed and five slightly wounded. They had assisted in capturing two *sungars*, and had carefully been kept out of the way of any *ghazis* who happened to be in their vicinity. The dear old colonel was now waiting for the coveted C.B. which was to reward his gallant services and shed a lustre on the regiment under him. His attitude just now was one of animated expectancy; by-and-by, when he had come Home, it would be one of suspended animation in a Service club window. But that is to anticipate.

The 111th was more than ordinarily fortunate. One of its junior officers had served as *maitre d'hôtel* to the general officer commanding the brigade (as is usual in Black Mountain expeditions) and had seen that the food was digestible, and that the general's baggage headed the line of transport. He was officially called a Staff officer, and he was now waiting for the D.S.O., an honour which would deservedly be his, for the general's bed had always been carefully laid out, and the food was all that could have been desired. The adjutant who had

dry-nursed the colonel had also been handsomely mentioned in dispatches, and there was a probability of one of the shower of honours falling upon him too. In fact there were so many stars and decorations flying around that even the junior subalterns hoped that they might come in for a share—"One never knows," said Lieutenant Smith sententially, "Great Scot! Jones got the D.S.O. last year, and you or I may come in for one this. It's all luck!" And the other subs. sucked down their pegs and nodded acquiescence.

Among the officers who had the honour of belonging to this distinguished corps was Captain Wortley Dampier. Captain Dampier would have made an admirable tipster for a sporting paper, or croupier at a gaming-hell; but Fate, or Fortune, had made him an officer of the 111th Foot. The favourite pursuit and passion of his life was horse-racing—though it was not his only one. Among his associates in this particular line he was considered "very smart." This being translated, meant that he was absolutely unscrupulous in his dealings, and that he never missed an opportunity of plundering others less intimate with the intricacies of Indian racing than himself.

"You have to pay for your experience, my dear boy," he used to say, as he pocketed a pigeon's cheque—that was true, for the pigeons sometimes had to pay very heavily—"as I have paid for mine." That was a lie, for his experience seemed to have been born with him.

Nevertheless, he had always managed to keep within the boundary line (the ethics of Indian racing are very broad), though he had nearly overstepped it more than once. He could ride, and did, which contributed a great deal to his success; and he could "pull" a horse as artistically as any "gentleman-rider" in India, which is saying a great deal. But "pull" as he pleased, there was one jockey who generally managed to "upset his pots" and "dish his soft thing," and that was his Nemesis of ill-luck.

The Dampiers' bungalow stood in the centre of the 111th "Lines." It was of the ordinary type of one-storied bungalow, with big, white-washed pillars supporting the heavy thatched roof. The "compound" in front stretched down to the dusty road which led to the barracks and then on to the race-course. Everything about the bungalow looked now at its best; roses clustered in profusion



along the gravelled paths, and the creepers which climbed up the pillars of the verandah on to the brown roof looked fresh and green.

It was early morning, and the sun was still low on the horizon. The morning breeze swept with delicious coolness through the gentle swaying branches of the great peepul tree, and fluttered its delicately pointed leaves. The peepul stood, like a giant sentinel, at the corner of the bungalow, and cast a protective shadow over the roof and the threadbare lawn in front, where a few blades of grass were struggling against the parching effects of the past hot weather.

One of the many *chicks* which hung before the glass doors opening on to the verandah was pulled back, and a woman stepped out. She stood motionless, for a few moments, in thought, and gazed abstractedly at a fat *durzi* who was seated on a broad mat in a corner, surrounded by piles of linen, paper patterns, thread, scissors, and all the paraphernalia of his craft. She lifted her face to the fresh morning breeze, and the slanting rays of the rising sun lighted up her sad eyes and played on her soft brown hair.

Punkabs, thermantidotes, and iced drinks, are

not conducive to feminine beauty. The climate and Anglo-Indian life generally works havoc on the fresh faces of the young damsels who trip so gaily across the gangway of the newly arrived P. & O. steamer on to the Apollo Bunder, full of happy anticipations of dancing, riding, flirting in dimly-lighted *kala-jughahs*, and everything dear to the hearts of girls fresh from the cold conventionalities of dull old England. But, alas! by-and-by the roses on their cheeks fade, and gradually yield place to the greyish-yellow tinge so often seen on the faces of Europeans in India. The peculiar malady of home-sickness generally comes after a few years, and many a once bright matron lies about in a darkened chamber, with dusky attendants moving noiselessly around, while in the next room an ayah is crooning native ditties over a restless gasping baby, as she listlessly fans the wasted atom of humanity in her lap.

Few of her home acquaintances would have immediately recognised in Mrs. Wortley Dampier the young wife who, only four years before, had left her secluded Cornish village. It was still the same gentle face, with large, questioning eyes and sweet, sensitive mouth, but the general expression

was different. Just now, she looked jaded and worn; the bright morning light brought out little lines which ought not to have been visible on the face of one so young.

She gave a little sigh, and moved slowly across to the corner where the old *durzi* was seated at work.

"No, I dare not send one of the *syces*," she said meditatively, "though he would go quicker; Wortley would only be angry."

"*Durzi*," she exclaimed, in that extraordinary polyglot language which Englishwomen in India use, and call Hindustani, "*Durzi, chello geldi* to the doctor sahib and *humura salaam do*. Doctor sahib *bolo* that missie *baba bahut bemar hi*. Now go *geldi*."

The old man understood that he was to call the doctor and that the child was ill. He stuck his needle into his turban and rose to go.

Just then there was a clatter of hoofs, and a man, mounted on a powerful "waler," came swinging into the compound and pulled up with a clatter before the porch.

It was Captain Dampier. He was a fine-looking man at all times, but he never looked so well as

when on a horse; he was a perfect rider and a wonderful horseman.

"Here, *syce*, take her away, and see that you rub her down properly. I'll come round myself presently, and if there's a wet hair on her, I'll break every bone in your body," he cried volubly, in Hindustani.

Looking up, he saw his wife standing in front of him. She had come to meet him.

"What on earth makes you come out into the sun like this, Madeleine?" he exclaimed irritably. "If I've told you of it once, I've told you a hundred times. You're looking washed out enough without making yourself worse."

"Oh, Wortley," she replied, without heeding him, "Lena is much worse. I'm sure she is ill, and I was sending the *durzi* round to Dr. Clayton when you came up. But now you can ride round yourself and call him; it will be much quicker."

"Perhaps it would," he retorted coolly as he dismounted; "but Starlight has been out in the sun quite long enough this morning. She cost me fifteen hundred, and I'm hanged if I am going to run the risk of having her laid up for all the kids in creation. Come in out of the sun. Burning

yourself as yellow as a guinea won't make the child any better."

In times gone by, a brutal speech like this would have hurt Madeleine far more than it did now. After four years, she was accustomed to this kind of thing. She was his wife; it was only what she had to expect.

She re-entered the verandah without further remonstrance, and repeated her orders to the *durzi*.

Captain Dampier flung his helmet and crop into one of the chairs in the verandah, and seating himself in another, shouted for a whisky-and-soda.

"Don't make so much noise, Wortley—you don't seem to care a bit about anyone or anything except yourself and your horses. I would have gone myself to get you a peg if you had asked me."

"Taking care of one's horses means taking care of one's money," he replied with lazy jocularitv; "that is, if you take care to run them to suit yourself. I didn't ask you to get me a peg, because I want to tell Karim Bux that I shall want the dun pony presently. I am going to breakfast at the Mess, and I shall be dining there to-night as well,

and go on to the lotteries after.—Ah! here is Karim Bux—bring me a whisky peg, and tell the *syce* to saddle and bring round the pony at once. Yellow Peter, the polo pony, you know.”

“Won’t you come in and look at poor little Lena?” asked Mrs. Dampier anxiously, when the *kitmatgar* had disappeared behind the *chick*. “She is burning with fever, poor child, and tossing about dreadfully. Do come, Wortley.”

“What’s the good? I can’t do everything. I’m not the doctor,” he replied. “He’ll be here presently, and then we shall hear what’s wrong. She will get all right, never fear. She’s been like this before. By-the-bye, where’s Vic?”

Vic was Captain Dampier’s pet fox-terrier.

Mrs. Dampier lay back in her chair. It seemed hopeless. She wondered vaguely if all men were like this in their home-life, when the thin veneer of society manners was rubbed off, and women knew them as they were.

“Vic is tied up,” she replied wearily. “I had her tied up because she kept coming into Lena’s room and making a noise.”

“Poor little beast—that’s like you, Madeleine. I’ll go and let her loose myself—you women are so

brutal to animals," he said savagely. He gulped down his peg, and strode round to the back of the house.

Presently he came back to the verandah with a small fox-terrier frisking about him. A pony, led by a *syce*, came round to the porch at the same time.

"So they went and tied up poor little Vic—the smartest little bitch of her size in India!" he murmured as he lay back in the chair and the dog leapt up on to his body and licked his face; "what an infernal shame. . . . . Now!" he exclaimed, jumping up suddenly, "I must be off to the Mess. I hear that something has gone wrong with Corisande, and I must find out all about it."

"But won't you come in just for a minute, before you go, and look at Lena, and tell me what you think?" his wife pleaded again.

For a moment he hesitated; then a gong sounded the hour from the barracks up the road.

"By Jove!" he cried, "there's nine o'clock. I had no idea it was so late. No; I'll have a look in by-and-by, after the doctor's been. Well, ta-ta for the present. *Hi, syce, tattoo lao.*"

There was a clatter of hoofs and a whirling cloud

of dust, in the midst of which the wretched *syce* tore along with a blanket over his shoulder, trying to keep pace with the pony in front, and Captain Dampier had gone to his breakfast.



### CHAPTER III.

MOST regiments have some object of which they are particularly proud. It may take the form of an ancient urn, or it may be a special brand of wine or cigars. Whatever it may be, it is a fetish, and revered accordingly.

The 111th (Prince Heinrich of Seidlitz's Own) possessed a silver snuff-box. There were several legends related about it, all more or less apocryphal, and differing in matters of detail as to character and locality ; but, nevertheless, the snuff-box was a regimental fetish, and a remarkably commonplace one to boot. Fetishes generally are. The regiment also prided itself on its port, and a wonderful vintage it was, supplied by the colonel's brother, who was a London wine merchant. This opened a wide field for commissions on orders, and what Sheridan called the "puff oblique."

Over the mantelpiece, in the mess-room, hung a half-length engraving of H.R.H. Prince Heinrich of Seidlitz, in the uniform of the Isle of Man volunteers,

with an autograph scribbled underneath. On the table, which was now laid for breakfast, stood one or two of the ten silver cups and vases presented by different officers, on promotion or retirement—mostly the former, for promotion was quick. The officers had a way of talking of themselves as the “Old 111th,” as though there were one or two new ones about. Perhaps it was necessary to remind outsiders of the age. It generally is among regiments of this type. And they are not a few.

There were only two occupants of the long mess-room. They were eating their breakfast. They were both in mufti, for it was Thursday, the Indian military holiday.

The small man with an abnormally large head and disproportionately thin legs, clad in riding-breeches and gaiters, was Mr. Montague Abercrombie Norton-Crawford, a lieutenant of about four years standing. He was the natural product of over-civilization, some generations of dissipation and an age of competitive examinations. He was the emulator, admirer, and recognised pal of Captain Wortley Dampier. He could ride under 8 st. 8 lbs., which he sometimes did with much profit to Dampier and to himself. Captain Dampier had

taken him in hand about two years previously, and taught him how to ride a race with advantage to himself, and now he was in all respects an apt disciple. His language was like his face, coarse and unpleasant, and he was better known among his friends as "The Vulgar Fraction."

The other man was a contrast in every respect. A tall, well-knit figure, with a pleasant, open face; rather more serious and reserved than is usual for a man of his years, but, withal, good to look upon. He was the senior subaltern in the regiment, but he had not belonged to it long. He had done excellent service and was considered a thorough soldier, one who would not be found wanting when the occasion should arise. He was not a rich man by any means, but he was looked upon as a man with possible expectations. Expectations, however, when remote, are as nothing to a surplus of ready cash—a sure passport to popularity in a regiment as elsewhere. Kenneth Goring was not a strictly popular man in his regiment. He was too quiet and reserved for one thing, he had little money for another. Nevertheless he was talked of as "a very good chap all round," which for once was true. He and Dampier were not great friends

—the latter did not understand him, and dubbed him “ass” accordingly.

Goring never said what he thought of Dampier; perhaps it was unnecessary.

“Taking the horses round the course this morning?” asked Goring, sipping his coffee.

“Only Catseye,” replied Norton-Crawford. “I have been taking her quietly over the fences. Dampier has been giving me a lead. She funks that water-jump a bit. She is an awful devil; they ought to have called her Jezebel.”

“Do you think she’ll win?”

“I really can’t say. Your money is always in the air in a steeple-chase, you know.”

“Yes, I suppose it is,” rejoined Goring, significantly. “As far as I can see, your money is equally in the air, whether it is on the flat or over fences. I may be wrong, but that is my impression.”

“You are wrong. On the flat, the fastest horse wins, provided he has a decent man on his back and—”

“Provided his owner has half of him in the lottery, and stands to win with the bookie as well,” put in Goring, drily.

“Well, there is something in what you say,”

laughed the other. "Why not? Why should an owner go to the expense of training and entering a horse for some fool to make money over?"

"A remarkably sharp man, hardly a fool."

"Well, no one can accuse Dampier of not running his horses straight, at all events. His animals are not always in form. How can you expect them to be in this cursed country?—naturally they get beaten sometimes when they are expected to win. But that all comes in the day's work in racing."

"Yes, it generally does."

"Dampier said he was coming over here to breakfast. Ah! here he is."

"Well, old chap; you've turned up at last."

"Mornin', Goring. Been playing golf, as usual?" asked Dampier with a half-concealed sneer, as he seated himself. "*Peg lao!*"

"Yes," replied Goring, ignoring the sneer. "How is Mrs. Dampier?"

"Oh, she's pretty fit, but the kid's a bit off colour. Hi! Abdullah, when, in the name of Jehannam, are you going to bring me that whisky-peg?"

"You are dining at Mess to-night, Dampier, I

suppose, before going to the lotteries?" said Norton-Crawford.

"Why, certainly my boy. If you are not doing anything this afternoon you'd better come across. I want to have a talk with you."

"All right, I'll tumble over," replied Crawford. "I hope that wild cat Catseye does not make a mistake over that 'on and off' to-morrow."

"That depends," said Dampier under his breath.

"She seemed to take it fairly kindly this morning," he replied in a louder tone; "but one never knows how the brutes will go when you want them. Are you coming to polo this afternoon, Goring?" he asked, as Goring rose to go.

"Well, no; I'm going for a ride. I thought, too, of dropping in to have a chat with Mrs. Dampier."

"She'll be glad to see you," said Dampier, as the other left the room.

"She is always glad to see that sort of idiot," he continued in a *sotto voce* to his friend when the purdah had dropped behind Goring. "Now, my boy, you must come over this afternoon, and we will have a talk about the lotteries to-night. Don't forget."

Goring shared a small bungalow with another

subaltern named Davenport. It bordered on the Mess compound. A dry, stunted hedge separated the two. The bungalow was of the ordinary dirty bluish colour. In front lay the usual little plot of dried-up grass, surrounded by a straggling hedge, which bordered on a circular, ill-kept drive. The porch had half the plaster knocked off the lower extremities of its pillars from the constant and rough contact of carriage wheels. Behind lay the stables. Four polo ponies and one raw-boned waler stuck out their heads between the thick bamboo bars, tightly roped up. They were gazing idly at the mysterious rites of curry-grinding, which were being performed by the syces' wives. A bearer was squatting in the sun on the threshold of his mud dwelling, discussing with one of the syces the price of rice and the character of his master, as they passed the evil-smelling *hugga* to one another. Another syce, seated on a *charpoy* close by, was investigating the contents of his long, greasy hair, and contributing an occasional grunt to the conversation of the other two; a conversation which largely consisted of grunts and strange, horrible noises, only to be heard in the domestic region of an Indian bungalow.

“ Bear-er-r ! ”

“ Sahib ! ”

Immediately the *hugga* was pushed into the corner behind the door, and the syces seized their brooms and anathematised the ancestors of the ponies in loud, voluble tones, as they swept out the stables.

“ Is that you, Goring ? ” shouted a voice from one of the back rooms of the interior.

“ Yes, you lazy devil ; aren’t you up yet. I’ve just come back from breakfast. You must have a sweet head after last night,” called out Goring, striding into the large bare room that opened out on to the verandah.

Three large, long-armed chairs, two small *teapoy*s, were all the furniture it contained. In one of the corners stood a bundle of golfing clubs, while round the bare, white-washed wall hung a long row of polo sticks, handles down, with bottles attached to keep them from warping. A set of boxing-gloves, a pair of foils, two masks and jackets carelessly thrown into a corner, and some crops and whips, completed the equipment. It was the room in which the two men lived. They slept in the two bedrooms that opened out from the



general "sitting-room," as they were pleased to call it.

The folding doors of one of the bedrooms were pushed open, and a man appeared. He looked as if he was not quite awake yet. His eyelids were red and swollen, and gave a melancholy though comic expression to an ugly face, surmounted by a shock of ruffled red hair.

"You had better order a pony and go for a gallop round the course," said Goring laughingly.

"I shall do nothing of the kind," replied the other, with absurd gravity, and, raising his voice, he shouted, "Bo-y!" with great vehemence.

An English-speaking servant from the southern province abruptly made his appearance.

"Go and get ready some mulligatawny soup, hot, and some grilled bones,—Thursday breakfast—with plenty of red pepper, tobasco sauce—*chel!*"

The "boy" disappeared from the room as abruptly as he had come, and left the two alone.

"Well, I'm off to have my tub. Shall be back presently."

Davenport disappeared. There was a great noise of splashing of water from one of the back

rooms, followed by an interval of silence; then he reappeared, clothed, in his right mind, and in uniform.

"I say, old man," he cried, "what the devil shall I do? I have only just remembered that I am orderly officer for to-day, and that infernal boy never woke me up. I have missed 'rations,' and 'guard-mounting,' and all the rest of it. Damnation! I'll kill that boy when I get hold of him."

"It's all right, old chap; you needn't alarm yourself. I heard your man vainly trying to rout you up this morning, and after seeing Spencer go home last night" (Spencer was the adjutant), "I got into uniform and went round for you myself. You can make your mind easy."

"Thank God!" he exclaimed, with huge relief. "It was awfully good of you—devilish good. I hope I will be able to do the same for you some day."

"I hope you won't," replied Goring, laughing. "I ought to get my company before the year's out, and then no more orderly officer for me, thank heaven!"

"Oh, yes, I forgot," said Davenport. "Let's see," scratching his head; "there's polo this after-

noon. I suppose you will be playing Red Robin ? ”

“ No ; I am not going to play this afternoon,” answered Goring. “ I’m going to look up Mrs. Dampier, and then for a ride with Laline L’Estrange. Do you want Red Robin ? Don’t play more than one *chucker* on him.”

“ Thanks awfully. I’ll take the greatest care of him. Any news in the *Pioneer* this morning ? ”

“ No ; absolutely nothing. The whole paper is full of the depreciation of that infernal rupee. I met Dampier and Crawford at breakfast ; they had just come in from taking their, or rather his, horses round the course.”

“ Oh ! I want the ‘ Fraction ’ to ride for me. I forgot to ask him. I suppose I shall have to toddle round to his bungalow.”

“ If you’ll take my advice, you’ll do nothing of the sort. That is, if you mean putting any money on it—between ourselves, of course.”

“ Oh, I know he is supposed to be smart, and all that ; but if a fellow can’t trust a brother-officer, whom can he trust ? ” said Davenport, picking up one of the neglected fencing-jackets and hanging it up on a nail.

"In racing, as no doubt you will find out before long—you ought to have found out before—you can't trust your own father or brother. Get the 'Fraction' to ride, if you like; but find out which pony Dampier has his money on. There's not much honour in racing, not even among the thieves, and they are many. When you are minus some hundreds of rupees, you'll probably realise it. However, your money may as well go into Dampier's pocket as into anyone else's, for that matter."

Davenport took the lecture good-humouredly. He knew that Goring meant well, but his ideas of honour were absurdly Quixotic for the ethics of Indian racing. Besides which, he had a bad headache and a consuming thirst, and therefore didn't pay much heed.

"I'll remember what you say, old chap, never fear. Now, I think I'll toddle across to the Mess and try to pick a bit. Well, ta-ta," and sticking his helmet well on the back of his head, the guileless youth sauntered out into the sunshine, whistling one of the last imported music-hall ditties all out of tune.

When he had gone, Goring threw himself back in one of the chairs, and lost himself in a day-

dream. He sat meditatively gazing at a small lizard which, strongly outlined on the white-washed wall, was stealthily stalking a belated moth.

A subdued deprecatory cough struck his ears. Looking round, he saw his white-robed bearer standing patiently with folded hands behind his chair.

“*Kya-munter*, what do you want?”

“The Sahib called.”

“Did I?—I forgot. Perhaps—well, never mind. Tell Kummel the syce I want him to take a *chit* round to the colonel sahib’s bungalow. I’ll write it now.”

When the bearer had left, he took a dainty envelope from one of the inner pockets of his coat, and, carefully withdrawing the note inside it, he read it through, as reverently as if it had been a big cheque,—the only note most men reverence. He knew every word of it by heart before, though it had only arrived early that morning.

“*My darling Kenneth*,” it said, “*don’t forget to call for me this afternoon for our ride* (‘as if I would forget,’ he muttered). *Ride your waler,*

*not one of your ponies, because I shall be riding my uncle's second charger—the chestnut; and it looks so absurd to see a huge man like you scrambling along on one of your polo ponies beside me on Rufus. I have just remembered that it is polo day. If you would rather play, you need not come. Send me a line by the syce, and mind he gives it to the ayah carefully. He is such a fool, that syce of yours—Ever your loving*

“LALINE.”

He kissed the note—he was such a fool—and replaced it tenderly in his pocket. Then he smiled a little grimly, and muttered :—

“Yes, she is quite right; that syce is a fool. For the matter of that, all natives are, and most white men too. Why on earth Laline wants to keep up all this mystery I can't understand!” He got up, and went into his bedroom. “It seems playing it rather low down on the old colonel. Well, I suppose, she knows best.”

Kenneth Goring was at the bottom a thoroughly sensible, level-headed fellow, but he had one weakness. Like many other strong and sensible men

he did not hesitate to give way to this weakness and cherish it, all the more because it was only one. His weakness was that very fascinating young lady, Laline L'Estrange. She was the niece of old Plunkett-Potter, his colonel, or rather of that wonderful and fearfully made woman, Mrs. Plunkett-Potter, his wife, the *de facto* colonel of the regiment, who had "exploited" her fair niece to India from the wilds of Ireland.

Goring enjoyed giving way to his weakness, the weakness a healthy youth calls love when the object is a woman of his own rank, but an uglier name if she be socially beneath him. He really loved Laline, and hoped to cherish her some day. But she was hardly the sort of young woman who inspires that dainty platonic emotion miscalled "love," in which the old lady (not the new woman) novelist delights.

"Let me see," he ruminated, squaring his elbows and seating himself at the small writing-table. "I'll run over to Mrs. Dampier at four, and have the 'gee' brought round then. Yes, that will do. Now for the note."

The note must have been something quite out of the ordinary run, for many sheets of note-paper

were torn up during its composition. But then writing letters was not in Goring's line. When at last it was finished, he looked at it doubtfully for some time before he put it in the envelope. The curious part of the whole business was that it only consisted of some half a dozen lines.

What a fool a man can be when he's taken this way.



## CHAPTER IV.

THE impression which would have struck a stranger, at least an average stranger, on going into the Dampier's drawing-room, and seeing the fair hostess thereof, would be a general sense of purity and refinement. And this impression would not be wrong, for the quality of refinement was innate in Madeleine Dampier. It was evidenced in her voice, gestures, and manner, in her dress and everything about her, and most of all in her gentle and almost child-like face. It always would be there, in spite of everything she had gone through, and in spite of everything she might have to go through. It could never be effaced. It was as much a part of her as were her eyes, or her hands, or her feet. A woman can generally be judged by the atmosphere in which she surrounds herself. Mrs. Dampier's room was always full of fresh flowers; there was a nice sense of the beautiful in the folds of the many draperies and *phulkaries* which form such a large part of the furniture of an Anglo-Indian

drawing-room, in the few pictures that hung on the walls, inexpensive, but all in good taste, in the little knick-knacks that were scattered about. Everything was in harmony.

This room was Madeleine's pleasure and pride. Here she read, or worked, or played with her child when she had leisure. Here she passed most of the interminable hours of the long, long Indian day. Here she often waited and watched, while the night dragged out its weary length, and the stillness was only broken by the slow tramp of the watchman—waited for the return of her belated husband, who generally spent the best part of the night turning his brilliant talents to "poker" and "loo." She held old-fashioned views, absolutely ludicrous in these days of "advanced" ideas and "emancipated" womanhood, of what she considered to be a wife's duty to her husband. She was really most out-of-date in her ideas on many things, and, despite her four years' training in India, quite unversed in that revised version of the seventh commandment which found so much favour in the eyes of the women of her acquaintance. Poor little woman, she suffered accordingly! However, with the faith that is born of ignorance and

possibly of something higher, she struggled on in what, to her mind, was the state of life in which it had pleased Providence to call her. It never struck her that possibly Providence had very little to do with it. Poor Providence, what sins are suffered in thy name !

Madeleine was just now awaiting the visit of her friend, Kenneth Goring. It is possible occasionally for a woman to have a friend of the other sex, and such friendship is generally safe when the man is in love with some other woman. But a man loves in different ways, and it is quite on the cards that he may be in love with two women at the same time and not know it. Mrs. Dampier had always liked Goring, and the link which bound them together was not of the usual type of Anglo-Indian "friendships." It would have been difficult to associate anything of that kind with Madeleine.

She lay back in a pretty bent-wood chair, drawn up alongside of one of the folding glass doors. A gentle breeze fluttered the lace curtains, and bore on its breath a faint scent of the roses clustering outside. Her face still had on it the anxious look which it had worn in the morning. But her eyes brightened when she saw a familiar and stalwart

figure coming up the garden path dressed in riding kit, and gaily swinging his crop.

Goring caught sight of her, and came across to where she was seated.

"I was half afraid that you might be sleeping," he exclaimed, "but I am rejoiced to find that I shall be allowed to have a chat with you after all."

She gave him her hand with a bright smile. He laid his sun hat and his crop on the ground, and drew a chair near her.

"I'm sorry to hear that little Lena is a bit 'off colour,' as Captain Dampier described it."

"I'm afraid she is very ill. I only left her a little time ago; she seemed then to be sleeping quietly. I told the ayah to come and tell me when she awakes. I can't help feeling nervous about her, she is so feverish. Dr. Clayton has been here twice to-day; but of course he will not tell me anything."

She gave a little helpless sigh, and looked beyond him at the garden.

"I hope you are not worrying yourself too much, and I hope it is nothing serious," replied Goring sympathetically. But as he looked into the young

mother's troubled face, he thought what a brute her husband was.

"It does seem cruel that the poor child should have to suffer like this," Mrs. Dampier murmured, as if unconsciously uttering her thoughts aloud, her eyes filling with tears. "But, Mr. Goring, why should I pour out all my woes to you like this?" she continued with forced cheerfulness. "Let us talk of something else. We'll have tea presently, and meanwhile you must tell me all you have been doing. Did you see my husband at the Mess? He has not come back since the morning, and I think he has some stupid Court of Inquiry or Court Martial. It is a shame to keep him away like this. I have sent over twice to him, and he has sent back word that he is too busy to come."

Goring did not say that he had only half an hour before left Captain Dampier in the Mess billiard-room with a big cigar in his mouth and a strong 'peg' half finished on the mantelpiece, playing "200 up" with Norton-Crawford for drinks. He thought that if any fellow deserved a good kicking it was Captain Dampier, and that he himself would like to administer it. But he kept his counsel, and said reassuringly,—

"I'm afraid Captain Dampier is rather busy to-day, but he's sure to be back presently. I saw his name down for polo."

"I see you are going to play," she said, looking down at his boots. She vaguely felt that Goring was excusing her husband, and though she knew he was doing it to save her pain, it hurt her. It was degrading that it should be necessary for anyone to lie to her about her husband. And Goring was a wretchedly poor liar, which made matters worse.

"No; I am going for a ride with Miss L'Estrange instead," he answered, "although it is polo day. You see I can be fairly sure of polo twice a week, and I can't be so sure of Miss L'Estrange. No; what I meant to say," he continued confusedly, "is that I would much rather go out for a ride with Lal—Miss L'Estrange, than play polo."

"I thought you were keen on polo. You used to say there was nothing like it in the world."

"Neither is there—in its way," he replied eagerly; "but I—"

Mrs. Dampier laughed.

"Well, I won't pry into your secret. Perhaps you will tell me some day, and then—ah! here's the

tea at last," she said, as Karim Bux noiselessly appeared before one of the curtains.

"I wish you'd tell me—that is, if you don't mind," Goring said presently, nervously stirring his tea, his eyes fixed on the sugar basin, "why it is you don't like—I mean, why it is you don't get on with Miss L'Estrange.? I want you to know each other better. That is why I ask."

It was a stupid question ; a man who had more knowledge of women would never have asked it. A delicate pink flushed into Madeleine's face. She was silent for some seconds, and leant back thoughtfully in her chair. She saw, or thought she saw, what was passing through Goring's mind. She knew that if she said what she really thought about Laline L'Estrange, it would not in any way affect Goring's opinion of that lady, while, on the other hand, it would surely hurt him, and might possibly cause an estrangement between him and herself. So she answered vaguely,—

"I am very slow at making friends. No doubt it is my fault. I don't think Miss L'Estrange quite likes me. No doubt she can be very sweet and charming when she likes—but I'm not a man, you know." Then as if to make amends for this rather

nasty hit, she added, "About her good looks there can be no question ; to see her mounted on a horse is a picture. Men say that one woman never admires another, but I admire Miss L'Estrange immensely—on horseback."

She tried to work some enthusiasm into her subject. Goring saw that she was evading his question and forebore to press it.

"All the fellows rave about her and hang round her wherever she goes, and men are always good judges," he replied defensively "especially of women they'd like to marry."

"Come—come—I thought you were very strong in your views about marriage, or rather against marriage, for young army men?" Madeleine said, rallying him with a laugh. "Was it not you I heard say some time back that Government ought to make it a rule that young officers should not marry, and that their being married always had a pernicious effect on them when 'on service'? In fact, you said it spoilt them. But I am afraid, like the application of all theories, this one breaks down when applied personally. Come, confess now."

"In most cases, of course; but there are always



exceptions, you know," he answered, getting very red and looking down at his boots. "Have you heard the latest news?" he asked, abruptly changing the subject. "I heard it at the club this morning—everyone was talking about it—Mrs. Radcliffe has run off with Captain Grantham. I am hardly surprised at her bolting; Radcliffe used to treat her abominably. It serves him right. She was such a pretty little woman too."

"I am afraid that last consideration goes a long way in forming men's judgment in such cases," said Mrs. Dampier doubtfully. "If she had a squint, for instance, it would have been different."

"If Cleopatra's nose had been an inch shorter, the history of the world would have been changed," quoted Goring gaily. "Men don't, as a rule, go mad over women who squint, though I have read that Mary Stuart had one. But as for Mrs. Radcliffe, it's a wonder to me that she didn't run away before."

"It's not for me to judge her. We hear of the fall; of the inward struggle against temptation, we neither hear nor know. But it's a terrible thing, all the same. My views are perhaps out of

date, but I hold them strongly. I cannot imagine how any woman with a particle of religion—leaving honour and everything else a woman should value out of the question—can bring herself to take such a false step. I look upon marriage as a sacrament, and solemn vows are not lightly to be put aside. But,” she broke off, with a little laugh, “I don’t want to preach to you. Let me give you another cup of tea, and we’ll change the subject. After all, it’s hardly a suitable one for us to discuss. I don’t know what makes me talk to you so freely. I think you must exercise some sort of occult influence over me.”

“I rejoice to hear it,” he answered, taking the cup from her hand, “and I take the hint. We will talk about something else. I suppose men and women think differently on these things—mine is the man’s view ; yours is the woman’s—that’s the difference.”

At that moment there was a sound of footsteps on the gravel path outside.

“Ah, here’s my husband at last,” exclaimed Mrs. Dampier, rising. “I must warn him not to wake Lena.”

But before she could stop him, a loud voice

cried, "Hi, Bearer—peg!" and Captain Dampier, in a very bad temper, stamped into the room.

"Ssh-h-h!" said Mrs. Dampier softly.

He was about to retort something unfitted for ears polite, when he caught sight of Goring.

"Having tea as usual, I see," he exclaimed, with a nod to Goring, and flinging himself into a chair. "The way women lap down tea is positively disgusting. I wonder when that lazy devil is going to bring my peg?"

"Have you finished your work, Wortley?" asked his wife, breaking an uncomfortable pause.

Dampier looked suspiciously at Goring and then at his wife. But seeing that she spoke in good faith, he answered with a grin,—

"Yes, and a precious tough job it was. I think Government ought to be hanged for working us so hard. The army used to be the profession of a gentleman, but now it's as bad as any common or garden trade."

"Which, being translated, means that we have to earn our pay, I suppose?" put in Goring tentatively.

"Pay!" retorted the captain scornfully; "do

you call it 'pay'? If I had only my pay to depend upon, I wonder where I should be, let alone the wife and family. I'm afraid—very much afraid that—ah! here's my peg."

"By the way, how's the *butcha*?" he asked indifferently, lighting a cheroot. Then he shouted to the bearer again—for his kit this time.

"Lena is asleep, and I wish you would not make such a noise," again repeated Mrs. Dampier.

"All right; don't nag. I am off to polo as soon as I can get my kit on. You are not playing to-day, Goring? Well, ta-ta, I must be off."

His heavy steps could be heard retreating down the corridor, and then a door slammed violently.

There was a little cry from an adjoining room. Madeleine sprang up.

"I was afraid he would do that," she said. "He has awakened Lena. I must leave you for a few minutes. Will you excuse me?"

"Certainly," replied Goring, who had risen. "I too must be going. I hope little Lena will soon be better."

She was so eager to be gone that she scarcely paused to hear what he was saying. The curtains in front of the doorway fell behind her, leaving

Goring alone before his sentence was finished. He stood for a moment in thought. Then with an expressive shrug of the shoulders, he took up his hat and crop and, stepping through the verandah, walked down the road to where his horse was waiting for him. He mounted, and rode slowly towards the Plunkett-Potters' bungalow.

## CHAPTER V.

LALINE L'ESTRANGE was essentially a woman of points. If she had been a horse she would have been described as "a rippin' filly." She was certainly a woman whose charms men never tired of discussing. Where other women more beautiful than herself would be silently admired, she was openly commented upon.

Her beauty was not of the kind which is born to blush unseen, and hers was a style which provoked admiration. She was tall, with a magnificent bust and a slender waist—rather too slender, perchance for perfect proportion. She moved with a sinuous grace seldom seen outside a *basquina*. The beauty of her face was concentrated in her splendid eyes, dark as night, which at one moment would sparkle and flash like the light on a facet of a gem, and, at another, would fill with sensuous languor. Otherwise her features would hardly square with classic canons of beauty. Her nose was too tip-tilted, her mouth a trifle too large. But her lips were full and

red, and her teeth of dazzling whiteness. She was, in short, a splendid animal.

Laline had been out in India just a year, and her friends and acquaintances (synonymous terms) often wondered why she hadn't "got off" before.

It was certainly not for lack of opportunity. Had not Lord and Lady Lochsporrان taken her up to begin with? Had she not the advantage of Mrs. Potter's matchless campaigning? Did not young Dodderell of the Hussars make such a fool of himself about her that his colonel had to send him home on a year's leave? Was there not that absurd row in the mess-room between Green and Kays of the 115th, which nearly led to a court martial? Wherever she went she left a trail of devastation behind her. When she went up to Murree, for instance, for the hot weather, she managed to turn that Hill station upside down, at least the male portion of it. All the women felt relieved when the cold weather set in, for no one knew what would happen next. The women in a body hated her—the married women because they never felt easy for a second when their husbands were with her, and the unmarried ones because her fascinations were a personal affront to them. All

sorts of vague slanders floated around her ; everyone repeated them, but no one really believed them. The only man to whom she had attached to herself for any length of time was Goring, and there were several bets pending as to when she would cast him off, like his predecessors.

“What on earth can she see in him?” the men would query. “What on earth can he see in her?” the women would say. Yet the fact remained, she still held him. “She’ll chuck him over like an old boot presently, you bet,” said the men. “She will never marry, and she will surely do something dreadful some day,” the women would repeat to each other, and sigh,—not at the thought of a possible slip, but for fear that their prophecy might not be realised. It would make such a spicy paragraph in the *Pioneer*, if only it would come to pass.

But, in spite of all, Laline went her own sweet way, and took no more notice of the murmurs around her than the buzzing of the mosquitoes. She knew what she was doing,—no one better ; she was the last person to let her head be guided by her heart. She had allowed herself to become secretly engaged to Goring, because she saw that it



was the only way of keeping him to herself; besides which, there was an element of romance in it which she liked. In her way she was really fond of him. He was a fine fellow. He appealed to her senses. His passion gave her pleasure and gratified her vanity, for Goring was not quite the same as *ces autres*. As to marrying him—that was out of the question. Once or twice she had pictured herself as the wife of a subaltern in a marching regiment, and laughed. She laughed very prettily.

Many people wondered why she had found it necessary to come out to India. The truth was that she never had a fair chance of getting a husband at home. Her father, an impecunious Irish landlord, had never been able to give her even the average opportunities. So her aunt's offer to exploit her was a God-send, and one of which she eagerly availed herself. Mrs. Potter and Laline got on very well, and understood one another perfectly. There was little of the duenna about Mrs. Potter, and there was nothing of the prude about Laline. She was discreetly blind to her aunt's little *affaires*. The elder lady repaid her by letting her do as she pleased. The old colonel sat

squarely in his chair and saw nothing. It was not intended that he should see anything, and like a wise man he forbore to inquire. The secret of a happy life consists in not knowing too much—at least, of a happy married life.

It was a perfect evening for a ride. The heat of the sun was over and gone; the noon-day glare is great even in winter in India. A little breeze had sprung up, and the sun was dropping slowly behind the row of trees that skirted the compound of the Potters' bungalow. Miss L'Estrange was ready for her ride. Every line and curve of her perfect figure was revealed by her close-fitting habit. As she stood there, framed between the thick white-washed pillars of the verandah, pointing, with outstretched arm and dainty whip, to some defect in the saddling of her horse, she would have served as a study for a modern Diana, or for a living picture at the Empire—one to which even prowling prudes could not object.

While she was posing thus, Goring rode at a quiet walk round the carriage drive, and caught sight of her. She had fully intended that he should do so. But it must have been instinct that

told her he was coming, for the thick dust on the side of the drive muffled the sound of his horse's hoofs. He involuntarily pulled up his horse, and gazed in admiration. The picture did not last long, for Laline lifted her eyes with a pretty affectation of surprise, and saw him sitting there motionless. A pleased smile of gratified vanity flashed across her face.

"I'm not late?" he said half apologetically, consulting his watch as he reined up at the edge of the verandah.

"Oh! no," she replied, with easy indifference, "you are up to time; only I thought you would come before the time, as you were going out with me, and so I came out in anticipation."

She would frequently, with *malice prépendse*, give herself away in this manner. It amused her to watch his look of perplexity as he tried to frame some clumsy reply.

"I wanted, and intended to come before the time," he replied confusedly, "but—"

"Yes."

"But—but I thought that if I came too early, I should have to go inside, and fall a prey to Mrs. Potter. Then I should have been done out of a part

of my time with you. You know, Laline," he continued, lowering his voice, "that I grudge every minute not spent alone with you."

"I know that is what you say—you all say it," she replied flippantly, and she moved towards the square mounting-block at the corner of the bungalow.

"No; let me," he cried, dismounting rapidly, as the impassive *syce* held his horse; "no one can mount you like I can."

She stood for a minute by her horse's side, and placing her foot in his hand, swung lightly into the saddle.

"Yes, you do it very nicely," she said, gathering up the reins. "Thanks; I think my habit sits all right now. Come, let us be off."

She promptly suited the action to the word, and started off at a rapid trot.

"Go and wait at the bandstand," Goring said to the *syce* in Hindustani. He put his horse into a canter, and caught up his companion, who was already out to the compound gate.

"Come, we will go for a spin till we get out into the country," she cried, setting her horse going.

They galloped along side by side, leaving a long

swirl of dust behind them, past the barracks and hospital, which gleamed square and white in the bright rays of the sinking sun. They skirted the race-course until they came out into the open country. A great, broad plain stretched beyond them, covered with fields, and dotted here and there with little mud hamlets and clumps of trees, while far away, behind them, lay the cantonments.

"Now I think we can go quietly," she cried, steadying her horse down to a walk.

Her face was flushed with the recent exercise, and her great eyes sparkled with excitement.

"We are close to the old place," she continued, "and we will dismount. I like to have you with me like this, Kenneth, all away from everybody—where no one can see us. We are just coming to the well. You can tie up the 'gees,' and we will have a quiet talk. Afterwards we will ride on to the gardens, and listen to the band, and be quite proper and sedate, so that all the old hens round the bandstand may not be able to cackle, and peck at my reputation—but they will, all the same! Ah! here we are."

Just off the road lay a thick clump of huge trees, with their branches all clustering together over-

head. In the centre, where the sun seldom penetrated, lay an old disused well, with a low wall running around it.

Here they dismounted.

They sat side by side on the broad low wall of the well. They were quite alone, hidden from the sight of man—and, what was more important, woman—by the dense shrubs and trees around them. Here and there tiny glints of golden sunlight flickered in through the leafy tangle overhead, and one narrow shaft slanted down and lighted on Laline's head like an aureole. Saints haven't a monopoly of aureoles; sinners often wear them too.

"You are very dull and solemn to-day, my knight of the woeful countenance," she pouted, raising her head and looking into his face. The aureole got in her eyes and made her blink. "*Peste!* Let us shift a little to get out of this glare." When they had subsided again, "Come, tell me what's wrong," she added coaxingly.

He kissed her before replying.

"There's nothing wrong," he said; "at least, nothing more than usual. The fact is, I hate all this concealment. It's unnecessary, and, besides, is hardly fair on the old colonel, Laline dear, he trusts you so

implicitly with me. And it seems rather—well, playing it low down on him, and on your aunt too. I wish you would let me speak to them about our engagement.”

Laline bit her lips impatiently. She had heard all this often before.

“My aunt!” she said, with a short laugh; “my aunt and I understand one another excellently well. Whoever heard of a man in love prosing to a girl about her aunt? Why, I don’t believe you love me a bit; you are much too cold-blooded to know the meaning of the word!”

He flushed angrily. “Dearest,” he said, “I do love you; it is because I love you that I am anxious that everything between us should be open and above-board. Besides, why this mystery? Our love is nothing to be ashamed of, is it?”

She looked at him thoughtfully, and noted his mood.

“Dear Kenneth,” she said winningly, letting her hand rest on his, “do be reasonable. I am sure the colonel would not give his consent to—to there being anything between us till you were—till you get your company; and—”

“I am certain to get my step in two or three

months" he broke in, "and surely we can be openly engaged meanwhile. We need not marry just yet, but everything will be straightforward."

"I hate long engagements," she replied pettishly. "Everybody looks at one in such a prurient way. I think engaged people always look such utter fools. If they are even talking together, everyone ostentatiously moves away, as though they were saying something improper to one another that ought not to be overheard. I think formal engagements are a mistake. Let us make a compromise. It is only a matter of a few months—when you get your step, you shall speak to the colonel, and my dear aunt too, since you make a point of it, and our engagement shall be formally announced. Will that do?"

But he still demurred.

"I don't know. I should feel more sure of you if the thing were settled now. There would be something tangible about it."

Laline looked at him hopelessly. Worsted in argument, woman-like, she sought refuge in tears.

"You surely do not doubt my love for you Kenneth?" she whimpered; "how can you speak



like that when you know how it hurts me? You men are all so selfish. So long as you get your own way you never consider a girl's feelings."

He looked into her tearful eyes and noticed the quiver at the drooping corners of her mouth. He could not withstand a woman's tears. He put his arm round her, and kissed her tenderly. He felt a brute to do anything which made her cry. After all, it was only natural that she should object to being pointed at and talked about by all the old cats in the station. He began to think that engagements altogether were most improper, not to say indecent.

They sat without speaking for some minutes, she with her head resting on his shoulder, and he with his arm around her. They indulge in sundry little by-play which it is quite unnecessary to explain in detail. . . . . The fair Laline's coyness as to a public engagement certainly did not extend to caresses in private.

A little grey squirrel sat watching them at the foot of a giant tree a few yards in front, and then jerked up his tail and whisked up the trunk. Save for the insects' drowsy hum, there was everywhere a great stillness.

Laline placed her hand on her lover's forehead with a caressing gesture, and pushed back his hair.

"I wonder what it is that makes me love you so, Kenneth?" she said slowly, more to herself than to him. "I wish we could always be together like this—you and I."

"We shall be some day," he said tenderly, "when we are married."

"When we are married!" she echoed impatiently; "how matter of fact you are. Can't you see, Kenneth, it is just this suspicion of stolen fruit which makes our love so sweet? When we have a legal license to love one another there will be no fun in it any more."

For all answer he kissed her on the lips. The beauty of the woman lured him as it has lured man ever.

"Yes; but when we are married, sweet, I shall be sure of you—you will be my very own," he said presently.

"Don't you be too sure of that," she rejoined flippantly—then noting his sudden movement, she added hastily: "Oh, no, Kenneth! of course, I don't mean that—what I mean is that all love is

not encompassed by a marriage ring. You talk about marriage as though it were the Alpha and Omega. But in the spirit we are wed already—when we first loved one another.”

“H’m, yes,” said Goring doubtfully. Somehow he did not care for these sentiments from Laline, though he sometimes indulged in them himself. “That sort of thing may be all very well for a marriage of the spirit; but you and I want something a little more substantial, don’t we? Book, bell, and parson is more in our line, isn’t it?”

“If you look at it in that light, perhaps it is,” said Laline, coming down from sentiment with a rush; “and the most substantial thing of all, is a good balance at our bankers. Until we get that, we’d better be content with the marriage of the spirit, Kenneth, dear—and postpone the other part of the business. That is what I have been trying to impress upon you. But come, it is getting late. How the time flies when we are together. We must get back to the gardens, and promenade round the bandstand, and watch the dear old general making love to all the prettiest women in the place.”

She rose to go.

"Wait here for a minute, and I will bring round the horses," said Goring, after an ineffectual effort to detain her.

She watched his stalwart figure push through the undergrowth and scrub, and then musingly traced patterns in the dust at her feet with the lash of her dainty whip.

"It does seem a pity," she murmured half aloud. "He's such a dear boy, I really believe that if I were much with him I might make a fool of myself and marry him in spite of all. If only he would look at things in a reasonable light, and let me get married to some old fogey, then we could enjoy ourselves, and it would be all right. But he is not that sort of man at all. He takes things too seriously. It is a great pity."

There was a crashing through the branches, and Goring reappeared.

"The 'gees' are quite ready," he cried. "You are looking very thoughtful, sweet one. What great problem are you turning over in that busy brain of yours?"

"The old problem of bringing one's desires into harmony with one's circumstances," she answered a little wearily. "It would be so much nicer if

marriage were not necessary to our happiness."

"My dear Laline," he remonstrated, "you—"

She raised her whip impatiently.

"Pray, don't lecture me," she said; "let me tell the truth for once. Marriage, when you come to think of it, is merely a matter of money—and, Kenneth dear, we haven't any."

## CHAPTER VI.

THE silver cups and vases down the centre of the mess-table shone brightly in the strong light of the wall lamps, and of the numerous candles which were stuck in the massive candelabra on the table.

Dinner was just over, and the gallant officers of the old 111th sat round the mess-table, with their chairs pushed back, talking, and discussing the wine and cheroots.

"Well, Dampier," said a fat major, taking his cheroot out of his mouth, and blowing a great puff of smoke across the table, "you must put us up to some 'soft' things to-morrow. Seems to be a very good programme for to-morrow's racing."

"Very good," replied Dampier, looking up from the lower end of the table, where he was engaged in deep conversation with Norton-Crawford. "There are a wonderful even lot in each race, so that 'spotting the winner' will be attended with a certain amount of difficulty. I hear that Kilkenny has

turned up to look after his string, so the lotteries ought to be pretty warm to-night."

One of the most popular men in India was Lord Kilkenny. He was an impecunious Irish peer (not a representative peer) with big estates on the west coast of Ireland, which he never visited, and little rents which he seldom saw. His official occupation in India was aide-de-camp to the Viceroy, but his ample leisure was devoted to the farming of rajahs, and teaching them the art of Home racing. It was occasionally attended by a good deal of expense—to the rajahs—but, after all, it was only fitting that they should shell out, for they were being civilised and taught how to be "sportsmen," and no one could teach them better than Lord Kilkenny. He would buy their horses for them, train them for them, and run them for them, and sometimes ride them for them, when it was necessary, and then he would return them. As a bee flits from flower to flower, so did Lord Kilkenny flit from rajah to rajah.

The particular blossom on which he was now engaged was His Highness the Maharajah of Kutchpawani, whose horses were included in Lord Kilkenny's string. The stewards of the vari-

ous meetings not infrequently found a difficulty in separating the youthful maharajah's horses from those of Lord Kilkenny. They *would* get mixed up somehow, and this occasionally led to little mistakes.

"Dam good fellers and dam good sportsmen some of these rajahs," Lord Kilkenny was once heard to remark. "I sold Castanet at the end of last season to old Jubbulpoor for five thousand. He was certainly on his last legs, but he had a real good strain in him; the old man wanted him for breeding purposes."

"But surely Castanet was a gelding, was he not?" inquired a bystander.

"Certainly, my bhoy. Didn't I say that they were good sportsmen? The old rajah didn't care, and it was not my business to tell him. If it weren't for the rajahs, I don't know where Indian racing would be. They simply keep it going."

They kept Lord Kilkenny going. And occasionally they went themselves. They had to go in strict retirement until such time as they could screw out sufficient revenue from their wretched subjects to begin again.

"I'm off to the lotteries," cried Dampier, rising and brushing the cigar ash from his mess-jacket.



"Any of you fellows coming? It's pretty late, and they begin at half-past nine punctually."

There was a general move, and the majority of those present tramped out of the room at the heels of Dampier and Crawford.

Outside, about a dozen ponies were waiting, with syces, wrapped up in blankets, squatting at their heads.

"I'll be first at the club," cried Dampier, springing on his pony. "Come along, 'Fraction;' five rupees that I will be at the club first," and off he dashed, followed by the others, laughing and yelling, as their ponies clattered along the hard road leading to the club.

As the noisy throng pressed into the large dining-room, in which the lotteries were to be held, they found it more than half full. Most of the men already there were, like themselves, dressed in mess uniform; but a goodly number of black coats showed here and there among the mass of red. Nearly every man was smoking; a large number were drinking whiskies-and-sodas, and all were talking and laughing loudly. At the end of the room a group of subalterns were gathered round a big fat man dressed in black, and were

shouting with laughter. He had just told them one of his spicy stories. Here and there other small groups were gathered together discussing the merits of the horses which were to run on the morrow.

A long table ran down the centre of the room, covered with a green baize cloth. At one end of the table stood two cylindrically-shaped boxes, fixed on uprights by two pivots, so that they could be swung round. One of these boxes held the names of the horses which were to run in the particular race on which the lottery was being held; and the other, the numbers of the tickets that had been sold. All over the table, lottery sheets and books, dice boxes and dice, peg tumblers more or less full of liquor, and trays containing the stumps of smoked-out cheroots, were littered about in profusion.

Presently a man with an armful of papers pushed through a group standing at one of the doors. He made his way to the end of the table where the two boxes stood, and threw all the papers with a bang on the table. He was the Hon. Sec. of the Meeting. Taking a small mallet from the table, he began to beat violently

one of the boxes. Instantly all the chairs were filled, and those who could not get a seat stood round behind the chairs.

"We will fill up the first race, if you please," he shouted, after he had reduced the room to comparative silence. "First race—Maiden Plate, half-a-mile for all ponies—" He proceeded to read out the conditions of the race, and the names of the ponies and the respective weights which they were to carry.

When he had finished, the room was filled with clamour—the rattling of dice boxes as the men tossed one another for tickets, loud questions and counter questions hurled from one end of the table to the other. "Toss you for five tickets—all right. Bearer, hi! Bring whisky peg—no, two—what's yours?—eights—yours?—tens—damn—stick it down. Bearer!—what race?—how in the devil can I help it?—" and so on.

In the midst of the noise and confusion, Dampier and Crawford sat side by side, with their heads close to one another. "I have spoken to Wilmot" (Wilmot was the Hon. Sec.), Dampier was whispering, "and he says he will see if he can get the order of the running changed; so you can let

‘Greyleg’ go easy in the half-mile race which they all think he will win, and in the mile we will put our money on. No one knows that he can stay. Have you spoken to young Davenport about buying in our ponies?”

Crawford nodded.

“That’s all correct. Damm’e, we’ll skin the lambs. The dear little lambkins, with their cover coats and field glasses, who think, little innocents, that they are ‘in the know.’ Ha, ha, you’d have been a lambkin, Fraction, if I hadn’t taken you in hand. Hi! Bearer, two whiskies-and-sodas.”

Dampier was in great “fettle,” as the Scotch say, to-night. He never enjoyed himself so much as when in a lottery-room. He took stock of the surging throng around him, who were laughing and drinking and tossing wildly with one another for tickets as fast as they could, and grinned. Dampier never tossed for tickets. The element of chance was too predominant. Opposite and around him, dotted here and there, were other owners, like himself, equally enjoying the sport.

Somebody once asked Sir John Bradford, who was in those days Secretary to the Government of India in the Tape and Scissors Department, why

lotteries were necessary to Indian racing. Sir John, ever ready with an answer, replied that lotteries were instituted to enable the owners of race-horses to feed, train, and run their horses from the proceeds of their friends' folly. And he was not far wrong.

Most of the "racing men" of the three presidencies of India were present. Close up to the end of the table, by the swinging boxes, sat Major Banal of the 105th Irregular Cavalry,—a tall man with a thick red nose, which he screwed up like a telescope when he laughed, and a large "waterfall" moustache, to which the fragment of a smoked cigar adhered. He was popularly known among his friends as "Ally," from his close resemblance to the big-featured individual who figures on the front page of a popular comic weekly paper. Then there was the short dark man on the other side, with a black moustache, who was said to give fabulous prices for his Arabs, that had never won a race worth mentioning, and never would. Then there was Lord Kilkenny, a host in himself, a handsome middle-sized man, with a knowing twinkle in his eye. He could give most of the professional jockeys 4 lbs. and a beating on the flat, and there

was no man to equal him in all India over the "sticks." By his side sat a native dressed in the most correct evening dress—it was Lord Kilkenny's latest blossom, the Maharajah of Kutch-pawani. A little farther down the table, on the other side, sat a big heavy man named Rainey. He used to ride once, but he had grown too fat, and his present occupation was breaking in horses and "skinning lambs." He was known among his friends (as a sort of standing joke) as "Gentleman Rainey." Sitting opposite him was a thin spare man, a Major Clery, a quiet bird, who apparently took no interest in what was going on round him; but no man was 'cuter, or knew the ropes better. He was known among his associates as the "Chalk-man," on account of an incident that occurred when he was riding in the mining districts in England. He was always so portentously grave and quiet that his very presence seemed to lend a moral tone to the proceedings, which otherwise was sadly wanting.

All down the table, here and there, they sat with a row of lambs separating them. They were all engaged, like our friend Dampier, in the pleasant and profitable occupation of "skinning the lambs."

And the lambs skipped around, shouting and laughing, drinking and smoking, till the atmosphere grew so thick with smoke that it was with difficulty that one could see across the room. The still, moonlit air outside rang with shouts of merriment. The lambs were being skinned, and they enjoyed it hugely—just then!

Suddenly a loud hammering was heard through the din and clatter. It was the Hon. Sec. banging on one of the boxes in front of him, trying to restore order. When the tumult had to some extent subsided, he cried in a loud voice:

“First race closed. We will now sell the horses. Two thousand rupees in the lottery, and His Highness the Maharajah of Kutchpawani’s Grey Arab Pony, Fancy Free, for sale—who will bid?”

A glance passed between Crawford and Dampier. Lord Kilkenny whispered a few words to the Maharajah, and arose from his seat.

“Fifty rupees,” cried the Maharajah.

“One hundred,” responded Dampier.

“Two hundred,” retorted the Maharajah.

“Three hundred,” exclaimed Dampier.

"Four hundred," shouted one of the lambs from the end of the table.

Dampier cried, "Five hundred," and proceeded to run it up to fifteen hundred.

"Two thousand," cried the Maharajah gaily.

"And fifty," exclaimed Dampier, afraid of going too fast.

Eventually the pony was knocked down to His Highness for two thousand four hundred rupees, and Dampier chuckled as he made a note of it in his lottery-book. This and the subsequent lotteries caused an assessment of an extra four annas in the rupee on land in the maharajah's dominions.

Two or three other ponies having been "sold," the Hon. Sec. announced in a loud voice, "Nine thousand three hundred in the lottery, and Mr. Richardson Black's country-bred mare, Rigoletto, for sale—any bidders?"

Norton-Crawford, from the other end of the room, ventured a timid ten rupees, and it was eventually knocked down to him for sixty rupees.

"Who is the rider of Rigoletto; never heard of the beast before?" Mr. Rainey enquired.

The Hon. Sec., after looking at his papers, replied, "Captain Wortley Dampier."



Mr. Rainey whistled softly to himself and placed a hundred rupees on the mare next day, when, curiously enough, she was started first favourite, and won in a common canter, much to everyone's surprise and the maharajah's discomfiture. But, as Lord Kilkenny explained to him, these little mishaps frequently occur in racing.

The lotteries on all the subsequent races were at last got through, and it was after two o'clock when the Hon. Secretary finally bundled his papers together and prepared to depart. Captain Dampier had not been wrong when he stated that the lotteries would be warm. Some of the "lambs" found them so hot, and were so badly singed, that it took them many years to grow a new fleece.

"I think we may call that a most excellent night's work," said Dampier, when the lotteries were finished—"most excellent, 'Fraction.' I think we have done ourselves proud. Now we will have a drink on the strength of it. Hi! Bearer," he cried, "two big whiskies-and-sodas. Look sharp."

The room had thinned rapidly, and not more than thirty men remained, who were standing in little groups round the table. Two wretched men sat studying their lottery-books now that the

excitement was over, trying to reduce chaos into something like order. One of the men closed his book in despair, and called for a drink, an example which was soon followed by the other.

"Who says Poker?" cried Dampier cheerfully; "the night is yet young. Come along, my beauties. We will see if we can get back a little of the money we have dropped." A proposition that was rapidly seconded by Crawford and one or two others.

"We will see if we can't drag some of your prospective ill-gotten gains out of you, if that is what you mean," retorted one of the men who had given up "seeing how he stood" in his lottery-book. With a scornful laugh, he joined the group and sat down to Poker.

"Poker is a game that I like better than all the others," said Dampier, meditatively, as he shuffled the cards preparatory to dealing. "It requires all the virtues of temperance, soberness, and chastity," he added, shouting for a fresh peg, "especially the former. How many cards did you say you would take, Wilmot?—three? There you are my boy; I'll stand on my hand."

Captain Dampier's luck at cards was proverbial, and it did not desert him on this occasion. It was

three o'clock before the party rose, and Dampier stuffed his friends' I.O.U.'s into the pocket of his mess-jacket.

"Now, you lucky devils, bachelors all, can go on playing until the rosy dawn, if you like," he said thickly; "but I, alas! must hie me home to the wife of my bosom, as the hour is approaching when no man sleepeth. Get me a final peg, Bearer, and a fresh cheroot."

He stood catching hold of the back of a chair, and rocking himself to and fro, reeking of stale spirits and innumerable cigars. After he had drunk down his whisky-and-soda, he slouched with unsteady gait to the door, and found his way to the portico.

It was a bright moonlight night when he started home. Several ponies, with blankets thrown over their backs to protect them from the cold night air, stood in a group on the roadway outside. "Dam shame keeping ponies out like this; ought to know better," he muttered, as he passed them.

He sailed down the road, which stretched before him straight and white in the bright moonlight, singing snatches of songs, and occasionally indulging in a half-suppressed laugh.

“Ah! here we are at last,” he exclaimed, as he turned in at his gate-way. “By Gad! there’s a light there. I suppose she is sitting up with that bally kid—just like her!”

## CHAPTER VII.

THERE was a great stillness in the Dampiers' bungalow, save, where in one room, a child's laboured breathing smote upon the silence. There was a great darkness in the Dampiers' bungalow, save where, in this one room, the faint glow of the shaded lamplight fell upon the figure of the ayah crouched upon the floor, (motionless but for the anxious glitter in her black, beady eyes,) upon the mother as she bent over her child's cot, and upon the flushed face and parched lips of the little one as she turned restlessly on the pillow. There was a great woe in the Dampiers' bungalow, the woe which only a mother's heart can know when she sees the frail boat in which all her happiness is centred drifting across the bar and feels powerless to stop it.

For hours Madeleine Dampier had watched and waited thus, while the swift shadows of the Indian winter's day closed in with a rush, while

the servants all departed to their *go-downs* at the back of the bungalow, while the doctor came and went, with a grave look upon his face and an unspoken pity in his eyes at variance with his normal professional calm. He had done all that he could. He had given minute instructions as to what should be done in his absence. He had answered Mrs. Dampier's agonised inquiries with a forced cheerfulness, and the stereotyped formula that "while there is life there is hope." And he had gone away again and left this woman alone—for an ayah hardly counts—alone, to wrestle with her anguish, while her husband was away yonder, heedless of aught save his drunken revelry.

Madeleine moistened the child's dry lips. Each fevered breath went like a dagger to her heart. She felt sick and dizzy with anxious watching.

"Here, ayah," she said to the figure squatting like a wooden image on the floor, "take *Missy Baba* for a time, and try again to make her sleep. If she can only sleep it will be the best sign, the doctor says."

She lifted the child lovingly, and kissing the tiny fingers of the hot, wasted, little hand, gave her into the ayah's arms. The ayah took the child,

and sitting down on her carpet again, began to rock her restless burden to and fro, crooning over the while the fragment of some old-world Indian song.

Mrs. Dampier turned away with a weary sigh, and began to pace up and down the room. Her slippered feet fell noiselessly on the matted floor. Her unbound hair fell in a shower over her shoulders. She was clad in a loose white dressing-gown which, with her pale face and purple-ringed eyes, gave her a ghostly look. Ever and anon she would pause to look at the little girl as she lay in the ayah's lap. At first the child tossed restlessly from side to side, and cried feebly. But Indian patience is inexhaustible, and the ayah went on humming and rocking, until at last her restless burden grew gradually quieter, and seemed in a fair way to sleep.

But the mother could not rest; her heart was hot within her; she was racked with anxiety, worn out with emotion. She looked at the time-piece; the hands pointed to half-past one. It was cruel that she should be left to suffer alone. Suppose her darling should be worse, how could she summon the doctor's aid? To whom could

she turn? Why did not her husband come home? One moment she prayed that he might come, another that he might not. With the desire to see him came the dread of how he would return.

She went to the window and, drawing aside the curtain, looked out. It was a brilliant moonlight night—one of those cold, bright nights one sees in India in winter. Every tree and every shrub of the garden stood forth distinctly, almost every blade of grass; the pebbles on the gravel path in front of the verandah gleamed whitely. She pressed her forehead against the cold glass.

“Oh, God! will this suspense never end?” she moaned.

But there was no sound, neither any answer. She could not see the road from here—a thick hedge blocked the view—and though she strained her ears, she could not hear the beat of footsteps. Everything was still—terribly still. . . . . Hark! What was that? . . . . . The howl of a distant jackal making hideous the silence of the night. First one, then another, then another; the whole pack were joining in now—a weird, melancholy chorus.



She turned away from the window, sick at heart. She drew the curtains close—closer still. The sound, though far away, might disturb her darling.

But apparently it had not. The ayah, without ceasing her brooding lullaby, looked up warningly to arrest her mistress's steps. *Missy Baba* was quieter now. She was not quite asleep yet—no, but perchance she was dreaming, drifting into slumber.

Madeleine paused uncertainly in the middle of the room. For the nonce she was not wanted here. With a weary gesture she put back her hair from her brow, and went into the adjoining room. It was a pretty room, plainly furnished as bedrooms in Indian bungalows are wont to be. The two beds were shrouded in diaphanous mosquito curtains; the floor was covered with matting; the simple furniture was for the most part of plain white wood or wicker-work. Still Madeleine had contrived to give an air of refinement to it all, and had scattered about little knick-nacks, books, and photographs, in the way a woman loves, and which served to remind her of Home. She went into the room blankly, mechanically, out of sheer restless-

ness. In her mute agony anything was better than sitting still. She felt so helpless ; there was nothing she could do. She felt so friendless ; there was no one to whom she could turn. Suddenly she went down on her knees beside the bed. Her faith was not dead in her. The last four years of disillusion had not disillusioned her religion. It is as natural for a woman to pray as to weep. Instinctively, in the anguish and desolation of her soul, she turned to that Source where many seek for help, and some find it ; where many crave for peace, and some get insensibility. She knelt there, her face buried in the covering of the bed, her arms thrust out upon the shroud-like curtains. Tears had come to her relief ; but she stifled her piteous sobs as she sent up voiceless prayers to the Great White Throne, that her one ewe lamb might be spared to her. But earth is near, and the Great White Throne very far off ; and human sorrow is near, and Divine compassion very far off.

Still, as she prayed, the tempest of her sobbing ceased, and when she arose from her knees, and went back to the other room, her child's breathing seemed to be more regular, and the little one smiled up a drowsy smile to her as she bent over the ayah.

The mother thought, poor soul, that her prayers were answered.

"She will soon be asleep now," she whispered to the ayah ; and the ayah thought so too.

Yes, asleep, the sleep from which there is no awakening.

Again Madeleine glanced at the clock. Two o'clock. There was no sign of her husband yet. She must sit up and wait for him. With a sickness of heart she thought how noisy his home-comings sometimes were.

She drew up a spider-chair and sat down before the jungle-wood fire. It had been burning brightly, for the night was cold ; but the room was warm enough now, and it had burned low. Madeleine rested her chin upon her hands, and watched the white ashes drop on the hearth. There was nothing else to do. She could only watch and wait for the return of this once hero of hers. She had done it often before—and often before he had come back to her sodden and out of all semblance of himself. But never before had the cruelty of it struck her so.

The minutes dragged themselves wearily by, and wore themselves into the night. Still the neglected

wife crouched there, her chin upon her hands, looking into the dying embers. As she looked, the past seemed to rise before her. She saw again the old grey church on the storm-beaten Cornwall coast. She lived again the day when, before God's altar, she had vowed to love, cherish, and obey the man to whom the Church had bound her until death should part them. And she had striven to keep her vows in spite of all those nameless indignities which only a wife can suffer from a brutal husband. She had kept them, though her ideal had been dragged down in the mud and shattered there, though she had been outraged, neglected, forced through experiences from which her instinctive purity recoiled. She had kept them as only a woman can whose nature it is to suffer and be still. If love were dead, was she to blame? Even love can be slain at last.

Four years! It seemed to her four centuries to-night, as she looked back across the gulf of her dead hopes, the wreck of her shattered ideals. Her love-dream had been a brief one, and from it there had been a rude awakening. She had seen the light of passion in her husband's eyes, and had mistaken it for love. Even in her honeymoon she

began to see that she was only part of his animal existence. Little by little the truth forced itself upon her, that she had given herself to a selfish libertine who had not even the virtues of his vices to redeem him. She had married, loving him for having chosen her, reverencing him in her pure heart as the one man whom she loved in all the world. But before the first year of her married life was over, she had found out that he had never loved her, and that his object in making her his wife had been to gain control of her little fortune, to pay his ruinous debts, and to squander the remainder on his selfish pleasures. Within nine months of their marriage, shortly after she had come out to India, her father died. His love might have shielded her in her sorrows, yet in the midst of them she found it in her heart to thank God that he never knew that she was aught but a happy wife.

Like her father, of business matters she knew nothing, and was easily persuaded—how easily none but a wife can know—to sign a power of attorney, giving the control of her money to her husband. A stranger in a strange land, she had none to advise her—none to help. Besides, who should interfere between husband and wife; it is

ever a thankless task. She had many acquaintances, but few friends; hers was not a nature to expand much in the artificial atmosphere of Anglo-Indian life. She even shrank from hinting her troubles in the letters Home to her friend, Mrs. Eveline, though numerous of them had reached the latter, and she read between the lines and sighed.

Madeleine's religious views on marriage bade her suffer and make no sign. She was this man's wife—for weal or woe. They twain were of one flesh; none could come between them—at least, none at her bidding. All that she had was his; she had vowed it.

In the first months of her marriage, her gentle nature was plastic to her husband's touch; a kind word wrought her to love, a rough one to tears. But four years of disillusion had deadened this fine sense. Kind words never came now—never since the signing of that power of attorney—and rough ones had become so frequent as to partly lose their sting. At first his infidelities maddened her; for Captain Dampier's infidelities were notorious, even in the lax morality of Anglo-Indian society. She felt degraded, humiliated, by them—

dragged down to the low level of those other women on whom he squandered her money, and for whom he neglected her. "You are not the only woman in the world," he told her brutally, when the full horror of the thing struck her for the first time, and the outraged wife remonstrated with him. But, latterly, she had become outwardly indifferent to that also.

There was a reason for this, for her interest was no longer centred in her husband; it had been transferred to her child—the one pledge of this unhappy union—the strong link which bound her to her husband now. All the love of her fervent nature went out to her little girl. For her sake she was content to bear all things,—her husband's infidelities, his brutal words; she might even have suffered personal violence, but he always stopped short of that. His cruelty was of a far more subtle kind. Madeleine lived anew in her child; her love for it was her salvation. It was this love which kept her pure through all the hollowness and the temptations of Anglo-Indian society, where, on most women, the gloomy weight of fashion and frivolity lies like a dead weight. Her husband, dog-in-the-manger-like, resented this love. He did not want

it himself, but he objected to its being wasted upon his child.

But Madeleine hardly heeded him. She loved to sit for hours in the verandah, playing with her little girl, the ground around strewn with broken toys and withered flowers. Or when Lena was tired, she would sit there, trying to rock her to sleep, despite the mima's discordant screams, and make the ayah chant soothing stories. She was absorbed in her child. The grass widows and officers' wives sneered at this display of maternal weakness. With most of them, children were a nuisance. Their dances, their squabbles over warrants of precedence, and their flirtations with their Hill captains, were far more engrossing. They openly pitied Mrs. Dampier, and openly flirted with her husband. They called her "a poor thing," and her husband "a sad scamp," and protested that her "airs and graces" were beyond endurance. A mere captain's wife, too! And "of no birth either," said Mrs. Plunkett-Potter. Madeleine had not heeded them hitherto. They might backbite, gossip, flirt, as much as they pleased, it was no affair of hers. She had her child, and that was enough.

The logs fell in with a little crash, and woke her



from her reverie. She glanced at the timepiece. Three o'clock. Would he never come?

Even as she thought thus, there smote upon her ears the sound of a heavy uncertain tread. How often before had the sound of that footstep made her sick at heart? But to-night she scarcely noticed its uncertainty; her thoughts ran wholly on her child.

Dampier pushed open the door, and came into the room. A glance sufficed to show the state in which he had returned.

He greeted her with a scowl.

"What!" he exclaimed, "you up still?—not gone to bed yet? You know that I dislike you to sit up for me. Why will you do it?"

She scarcely noticed his rough words. She ran towards him with uplifted finger.

"Hush, Wortley," she whispered; "do not speak so loud. Lena is very ill—but sleeping; it is the best thing. We must not wake her, the doctor says."

He looked at her and blinked. She had put both hands upon his chest in the earnestness of her pleading; her face was upturned to his. He reeked with the odour of stale tobacco smoke, and his

breath was whisky-laden. She could not forbear a momentary spasm of disgust. But she conquered it.

"Do come and see if you think she is better," she pleaded. "Oh, Wortley, do tell me what you think. Shall we send for the doctor again?"

"I don't know whom you will send," he answered roughly, lowering his voice to a gruff whisper. "I am not going, if you mean that. But let us have a look."

He went across the room to Lena's cot. The ayah had put the child back now, and squatted on the floor, keeping guard. Despite the noise, the little one was sleeping, or seemed to be so.

"What do you think, Wortley?" his wife asked in a whisper. Her very soul seemed to hang upon her words.

"The child's all right," he said brusquely, turning away as he spoke. "She's going on nicely. There was nothing much the matter after all. You have been fretting yourself about nothing—as usual."

She ignored his palpable indifference, the roughness of his words, in the comfort which they brought to her. When one wishes a thing very

much, the merest crumb of comfort comes as a confirmation of one's hopes.

The ayah's eyes glittered, but she said nothing. She knew what this deep slumber meant. She had seen it often before.

Dampier watched his wife curiously as she hung over the cot. The fumes of wine were in his brain, his blood was heated. He was not quite drunk, nor yet quite sober.

"Come," he said presently ; " we can't stay here all night. Lena's right enough. The ayah will look after her. Come."

He put his hand upon her shoulder, and drew her away as he spoke.

She looked at him for a moment dumbly, an expression, half of dread, half of protest, in her eyes. Then she moved away from him a little space.

" Oh, Wortley. I must stay here to-night. I cannot leave the child. Think, she may die—she—"

" May not !" he finished brutally. " The child—the child, always the child ! Have you no duty to me, do you think ?—Come. . . . .

" What nonsense you talk," he continued, more quietly. " The ayah can call you if the child is

worse — we are close by — you can come back again.”

She thrust out her arms to ward him off.

“Oh! I cannot,” she said. “Do not ask me; I cannot.”

“You will do as I bid you,” he said in a hoarse whisper, “or, by —! I will turn the ayah out and the child too. They can go to the *go-downs* out of the way. You know me—you—”

She swayed, and caught at a chair for support.

“I cannot,” she wailed, again. “God help me! I cannot.”

All the untold agony of woman came forth in that cry.

For all answer he stepped towards the cot. In another instant the child would have been awakened. With a swift gesture, she threw herself before him.

“I will do as you wish,” she whispered, still with the horror on her face; “anything you wish, only—do not wake her.”

A gleam of triumph shone in his eyes—but he said nothing. He turned on his heel, and, as noiselessly as he could, went into the adjoining room.

She gave one backward glance towards the cot, and with bowed head followed him.

. . . . .

An hour passed. Everything was still in the room where the child seemed to sleep. The grey dawn straggled through the chinks of the blinds, and warred with the dim lamp-light. Even the ayah's vigilance had relaxed at last. Her head had fallen forward on her breast; she was slumbering peacefully. Except for her heavy breathing, everything was still.

The door of the room adjoining opened noiselessly and a slender white-clad figure came forth. It was the mother creeping back again. There was little fear of interruption, for her husband was snoring heavily—sleeping off the effects of his carouse. The horror was on her face still, intensified if possible. She crept to her child's bedside. She seemed to be sleeping very soundly—not even a breath could be heard. The mother bent over the cot and dropped a kiss, light as a falling rose-leaf, on her darling's brow. The contact struck a chill to her soul. Why was she so cold? Why this awful silence? Not a flutter of breath came from the little lips.

A sudden spasm of terror seized her. With a loud cry she caught her dead child to her breast, a cry that rang through the silent house, penetrating even to the *go-downs*, a cry that awakened the sleeping

ayah, a cry that roused even the sodden brute in the adjoining room: "Lena, my darling, look at me! speak to me! It is I—your mother, darling, who calls to you! Oh, God! she is dead—dead—she has gone from me! While I—I—"

Her voice died away in a sobbing wail. It was the moan of Rachel mourning for her children, and would not be comforted, because they were not.

## CHAPTER VIII.

THE Hills—the deep blue Hills—reached up to the sky right away on the horizon. Their jagged peaks, faintly outlined through the misty haze, stretched away until they were lost to sight in one dim mass of blue.

At least this was how they struck the belated Goring, left behind at Dustypore, as he meandered along the white dusty road on his pony in the evening sunset, back to the Club. He gazed under the brim of his thick *sola topee* at the deep blue mass far away, and dreamed of steep green hill-slopes, of sweet-scented pines rocking to and fro in the cool evening breeze, of broad valleys stretching away till they merge in the distance with the level brown plains. And, as he mused, he could almost hear the “clink, clink,” of the jolting tonga-bar, yoked to a pair of ragged, half broken-in ponies. He could almost hear the clatter of their hoofs as they galloped up the narrow cart-road, swinging

round the sharp corners, and grazing the parapets of loose stones that overlooked sheer precipices. He could almost picture the final stage, when the tonga, turning the last corner, brought Elysium—the most delightful of all Hill stations—into view.

Elysium, with its little bungalows nestling in the wooded hill-sides—Elysium, with its dark firs and blazing rhododendrons—Elysium, with its hotel (a mass of bungalows joined together) crowded full of people, all bent on one pursuit, pleasure, or what passed muster for pleasure—Elysium, with its dances, picnics, private theatricals, dinners, anything that makes “time fly with gladsome feet”—Elysium, with its flirtations in *Kala-jugahs* cunningly contrived with low divans and masses of phulkaries, dimly lighted by a solitary Chinese lantern, which always managed to go out—Elysium, with its *Gym-khanas* on the only level strip of green, with tent-pegging over hurdles for the men, and tilting at the ring with billiard-cues for the women, and the big marquee at the side, with long drinks for thirsty warriors.

Then the belated Goring sighed and counted up the days which would bring him in reality to Elysium. And on the strength of it he took an extra



lump of ice in his peg when he reached the Club. For Laline was at Elysium, and, to Goring, Elysium meant Laline.

. . . . .

Eighteen months have passed since the night of the lotteries at Dustypore, and most of those who have been mentioned in these pages have betaken themselves to Elysium at the beginning of the hot weather.

They had been eighteen months of weariness and hidden heartache for Mrs. Dampier—eighteen months of drinks, long nights at mess or club, of heavy play with a steady run of bad luck, for Captain Wortley Dampier—eighteen months of careful and judicious intrigue for Laline L'Estrange, all of which time she had managed to hold Goring, though the ropes had at times been strained to breaking-point—eighteen months of alternate hope and misgiving for Goring, now Captain Goring—eighteen months of careful living, of scandal and flirtation, for the ever youthful and joyous Mrs. Plunkett-Potter, the delight of under-secretaries and Hill captains, and the goddess of unfledged subalterns.

During these eighteen months a new element had entered into the lives of these, an element which bade fair to play rather a large part in their various vicissitudes.

This element was Sir John Bradford, K.C.S.I., Secretary to the Government of India in the Tape and Scissors Department.

When young Bradford entered the Indian Civil Service some thirty years before, his uncle, then a member of the Legislative Council, gave him some advice after the manner of Chesterfield, backed by many years of experience. He did not give him much else, for people who are so generous in this respect are generally remarkably close in others.

"You must write reports, my boy," he said; "and always keep on writing reports. Always keep in with your seniors at any cost, and never grudge them the credit for any good work you may do. They will take it in any case. When you attain higher offices, you will take all the credit for the work done by your juniors, and so the thing will balance itself. That is one of the great unwritten rules in the service of the Government of India, as you will find out for yourself when you grow older. Learn to play whist, and learn to play well; thus

you will be brought into closer contact with your seniors, and you will be able to help them to win money—or occasionally to lose a little to them, a very useful investment. In small disputes, always back the opinion of the bigger man. And don't forget the women—women have influence. But only cultivate the wives of your chiefs—the old and ugly—and leave the poor and pretty alone. These latter are a man's worst enemies—especially a young man who wants to get on in the world.”

These and many other maxims did John Bradford imbibe in his youth, as he sat at the feet of that old Gamaliel, his uncle, who was a member of the Legislative Council. And he pondered them in his heart.

From the first, Bradford was considered a promising man. When he married the plain and elderly daughter of a member of the Supreme Council, a lady many years his senior, everyone saw and admitted that he was a made man, that his future was assured, and that high honours were only a matter of time. By his marriage, he acquired that touchstone of official life without which all struggles are unavailing, and the best work is only as a breath of wind—interest

His married life was hardly harmonious, in fact, it may best be described by the familiar allusion to "cat and dog." The only happy thing about it was the happy release. It is doubtful which of the two felt more relieved when the lady departed to a better land, where selfish husbands cease from carping, and nagging wives are at rest.

Bradford's greatest stroke of genius, the result of many years of careful study and experience, was when he managed to raise a famine in one of the most prosperous and fertile districts of India. Nature helped him to some extent, but all the other part he managed himself. It was a really skilful piece of work, well planned, and admirably carried out. Other men of his standing watched and envied, and called it "luck"; but it was not. The men up above said, "This man is a genius, and is wasted down below," so they gave him a Star of India, and transferred him to Simla. There was nothing now that was above his reach, and he took all that he could get. He had never married again, for he was a man with large patronage in his hands, and therefore did not think it necessary. Of course he had his weaknesses—what great man has not? His particular weakness was a strongly-

developed, erotic element in his nature, a weakness which frequently accompanies abnormal brain-power. His amours were numerous, and he took no trouble to conceal them. His attention to any woman whom he might favour was always a very doubtful compliment.

There had been a glorious break in the rains, which promised to last. Hardly a cloud was to be seen in the bright blue sky, and warm sunshine lighted the hill-tops and flooded the valleys around Elysium. Everywhere all was fresh and green and beautiful.

On the strength of the delightful weather, Mrs. Plunkett-Potter had decided to give a picnic to her pick friends and acquaintance, at the advice and under the management of Laline. No one knew how to arrange picnics like Laline.

On the narrow gravel path, which ran in front of the verandah of the Potter's bungalow, known as "The Firs," was scattered a group of horses, each with a syce squatting at its head. Their several owners were in the drawing-room, or under the verandah which opened from it. In the centre of the group was Mrs. Plunkett-Potter, holding an

animated conversation with Captain Wortley Dampier, on one of the few subjects on which it was possible to converse with him—horses. On a seat by the window, Madeleine Dampier was chatting with a young Under-Secretary. Lord Kilkenny and old Lady Fitzpoodle were comparing notes in the verandah; while, standing against the mantelpiece playing with her riding-whip and looking her best, stood Laline, talking to an undersized elderly man with a large, bald head fringed with greyish-red hair—Sir John Bradford, to wit. Davenport, and a few subalterns up on privilege leave, and two or three ladies, completed the party.

“I think it is time to make a move,” said Miss L'Estrange, breaking in during a lull in the general conversation. “We have a long way to go. What do you think, Sir John?”

Sir John thought it an admirable proposition, and proceeded to put it into immediate execution, accompanied by Laline. The others sorted themselves, as people have a knack of doing on these occasions, and—with some of the ladies in *jam-pans* and others on horseback—followed after.

## CHAPTER IX.

ABOUT an hour's easy riding over somewhat uneven ground, but in the shade for the most part, brought the whole party to the place where they had elected to lunch. The servants had gone on before, and everything was arranged : camp stools, rugs, and so forth in plenty, so as to make the process of eating one's lunch in uncomfortable positions as little uncomfortable as need be. It was a pretty spot—a level strip of sward hedged in on three sides by jungle-wood, the other open to the distant hills.

Everyone seemed glad to get there, and soon all were enjoying an excellent lunch, and chattering away gaily to a running accompaniment of the popping of corks and the clatter of knives and forks. Everybody was in high spirits. Even Mrs. Dampier, who found herself next to Sir John Bradford, was laughing with the merriest among them. Madeleine had changed considerably during the

last eighteen months; she had "come out," her friends said. The death of her child, a terrible blow to her, had snapped the strongest of the few remaining links which bound her to her husband. She had become passively indifferent towards him, almost heedless of his infidelities, and comparatively insensible to his sneers. After all, when one is young, and blessed with perfect health, one cannot grieve for ever. The hollow in Madeleine's cheek had filled out to a pure oval, the wild-rose bloom flickered there again. She looked exceedingly pretty to-day in her white dress and hat, just dashed with mauve, her face lit up with a laugh at some passing jest.

Sir John Bradford thought so evidently, for he devoted all his attentions to her, and completely ignored Miss L'Estrange—who was sitting the other side of him—much to the disgust of that young lady, who had to content herself with the Under-Secretary. It was exasperating, too, for this picnic had been arranged mainly with a view of bringing him to the point. But Sir John was an old bird, and even the honeyed sweetness of Miss L'Estrange's smiles were apt to pall occasionally on his jaded palate. Mrs. Dampier was like a cup of



cold water after a highly-spiced draught. She was different to the ordinary run of Anglo-Indian women, many of whom, like ripe fruit, were ready to drop into his mouth; her reticence egged him on, her modesty secretly provoked his desire. And Madeleine, though she disliked him in her heart, had received a hint from her husband to be civil to him. It was some question of staff appointment, she thought; for Sir John, though he had no direct influence in the army, had a good deal indirectly. The real reason, that Captain Dampier owed him a large sum of money, never struck her. Dampier had now run to the end of his tether; the situation was desperate. Sir John was pressing for payment; but if Dampier could only use his pretty wife as a decoy, the day of reckoning might be warded off a little longer, or he might even borrow a little more. The unsuspecting Madeleine, all ignorant of this, tried her best to be agreeable to Sir John, and to-day she was succeeding very well, so well, indeed, that Mrs. Potter had more than once telegraphed significant glances to Laline, which that young lady altogether ignored. Perhaps, too, there was a little dash of triumph in Madeleine's smiles; for, after all,

Sir John was the lion of the party, and a very amusing companion when he chose to be.

Mrs. Potter, however, thought "that Mrs. Dampier" had monopolised her lion long enough, so she swooped down upon their conversation by asking Sir John point blank what he thought about a certain colonel's wife—a new arrival at Elysium—whose reputation Mrs. Potter and the other ladies had amused themselves with demolishing.

"Eh?" said Sir John oracularly, looking up out of his little red eyes. "Do you know, my dear Mrs. Potter, I never give an opinion on a doubtful subject."

There was a general laugh at this. Captain Wortley Dampier laughed quite the loudest.

"Sir John is pleased to be diplomatic," said Miss L'Estrange, with curling lips. "And yet some one has said somewhere that it is the opinion of men which makes the reputation of women."

"Then heaven help them!" exclaimed the Under-Secretary, with a killing glance at Miss L'Estrange. She took not the slightest notice of it. Why should she? He had a wife and three children at Home.

"I would rather trust my reputation to men than to women any day," she added.

"That only means that you have much to learn, my dear," severely interposed Lady Fitzpoodle, a tall gaunt woman like a grenadier in petticoats, whose hard features and harsh voice made one involuntarily wonder however her diminutive little husband—who was a General and a K.C.B.—had mustered up courage enough to marry her. In point of fact, it was she who had married him, having stalked him all over India for that purpose.

"Ah! of course I haven't had your experience, dear Lady Fitzpoodle," rejoined Laline sweetly, "but no doubt I shall have it in time."

Lady Fitzpoodle bridled, and made a savage attack upon her *paté-de-foie-gras*.

"And it is a great thing to have experience," continued Laline, with the same air of candid innocence, "especially for women. It involves a past; and to be truly interesting, all women should have pasts, and all men futures. Do you not think so, Sir John?"

"Really!" protested Lady Fitzpoodle, rallying her forces; "such sentiments from a young

girl! When I was young, things were very different—”

“Yes, but that was such a *very* long time ago, dear Lady Fitzpoodle,” rejoined Laline, with unalloyed sweetness. “*Things vont vite* now-a-days.”

Sir John Bradford laughed; one or two others followed suit. Lady Fitzpoodle glared and prepared a crushing retort. She hadn’t got further than “They do indeed,” when Mrs. Potter struck in precipitately, and dragged the conversation back to the point from which it started.

“But we were talking about this—ahem!—person,” she said plaintively. “It is really most awkward. She has the next bungalow to us, and it is most difficult to know what to do. It is quite impossible to call upon a woman with—ahem!—a past.”

“A past before she married? Isn’t that rather reversing the order of things as we understand it?” grinned Sir John.

“And they say she and her husband quarrel like cat and dog,” continued Mrs. Potter, ignoring this last remark. “Considering how well she must have known what he was like before they married, I really wonder why she married him.”

"Perhaps she did it out of revenge—and not a bad one either," chuckled Sir John. "What do you think, Mrs. Dampier?"

"I have no means of judging," said Madeleine indifferently. "My neighbours' affairs do not interest me."

"What an extraordinary thing!" exclaimed Mrs. Potter, reddening at the implied rebuke; "but then we all know, dear Mrs. Dampier, that you are not an ordinary person. For my part, I confess frankly that there is nothing so interesting as one's neighbours' affairs. What on earth else are we to talk about?—we can't bore people with our own."

"True," said Sir John sardonically; "if we were to leave out of our conversation scandal and the weather, how commonplace we should become."

"That is a commonplace," vivaciously retorted Mrs. Potter. "After all, what does it matter? They do just the same to us when our backs are turned. Half the pleasure of possessing friends is to discuss their faults. By magnifying them, one seems to minimise one's own, until at last one feels positively virtuous. It's quite a mistake to think one always abuses one's friends out of ill-nature."

"One's friends!" repeated Sir John Bradford. "Who are they?—the people who eat at one's dinners, are they not?"

"Precisely, and whose dinners we eat—cutlet for cutlet, you know. But come—I hate discussions on abstract theories. Mr. Davenport," turning to her latest subaltern, "you are a man of ideas, what shall we talk about?—something safe and harmless, you know."

"Books?" he suggested wildly, taken aback at this unexpected appeal.

"Books—pooh!" said Wortley Dampier. The only book worth reading, in my opinion, is the 'Asian Pocket Book.'"

"So I should think," said Sir John Bradford drily. "What do you think, Mrs. Dampier?"

"I—I—" she said, somewhat nonplussed. She forgot that her husband was used to Sir John's sneers. "I think most books fail to interest one—after all, that is not to be wondered at. People write best, I should think, about their actual experiences, and those are the things one would least like to see in print—human documents, so to speak."

"What a pessimistic utterance!" exclaimed Miss

L'Estrange ; "it augurs that one's experiences must be singularly dull, or singularly unfortunate, Now, for my part, I never read books—except novels—French novels for preference."

This with a defiant glance towards Lady Fitzpoodle. But that matron, mindful of her previous discomfiture, wisely chose to ignore it.

"Oh, novels!" said Lord Kilkenny contemptuously ; "it seems to me that they are all—or nearly all—written on a wrong basis : they treat marriage as the end of all things, whereas it is but the beginning."

"So it is to a woman," said Laline, "but not to a man. It is his last chapter rather than his first ; that is where the unfairness comes in."

Lord Kilkenny cast a covetous glance at Laline, who was looking very fresh and desirable in an exquisitely fitting habit. His eye twinkled, but he said nothing.

"Well, that is one way of looking at it, anyway," said the Under-Secretary. "Then you probably agree, Miss L'Estrange, that no one marries now, except very wise women, and very foolish men."

"I don't know ; I never generalise," answered Laline. "Like everything else, it all depends."

"That is the Bishop of Kolopul's view," said Lord Kilkenny with a laugh, "'it all depends.' I remember his wife telling me at an official dinner at Government House that 'the dear Bishop *never* marries anyone below the rank of a Lieutenant-Colonel.' 'My dear,' rebuked the Bishop across the table, 'it all depends.'"

"I agree with Mrs. Dampier," said the Under-Secretary, harking back to the point; "romances—real romances—are not in books, but in life; and marriage is a sorry ending to them."

"What a sentiment for a much married man!" broke in Wortley Dampier. "Of one thing I am sure: marriage is an institution invented entirely for the benefit of women. I should advise them to cherish it."

"Dear me," said Sir John Bradford blandly, "and yet the only merit of many a man is his wife."

It pleased him to give these little digs at Wortley Dampier; he was safe in the assurance that his victim dare not retort. He had an idea that it pleased Mrs. Dampier also. He little knew her.

"I don't agree with these opinions," said Mrs. Potter with playful protest; "in our artificial state of society, marriage is a very necessary institution."



"And a very convenient one too," said Sir John significantly—so significantly that Mrs. Potter reddened beneath her rouge. "But what does Mrs. Dampier think of it?" he asked, turning to Madeleine.

"I think you are looking at marriage as it sometimes is, rather than as it ought to be," she answered. "Suppose we look at the ideal instead. Love is marriage, and marriage is love, then."

"Yes, but to continue love in marriage is the rub; for, unfortunately, it has a knack of transforming into a duty that which would otherwise be a delight," said Sir John. "In marriage, as in most things, 'it is ever the commencement which is charming,' as La Rochefoucauld would say."

"Then, why not commence again, dear Sir John?" gushed Mrs. Potter.

Sir John bowed his bald head.

"If I were only younger, and Mrs. Potter were only free, how gladly would I take up the challenge."

Mrs. Potter smirked and smiled. No compliment, however flagrant, ever came amiss to her. The others laughed.

"Ah, well!" she said irrelevantly, lighting a

cigarette, "who knows? This is an age of new ideas, but we haven't yet rendered marriage unnecessary."

"An age of new ideas! Do you really think so?" exclaimed Sir John. "Why, we haven't invented a new sin—it would at least be a new sensation."

"You wicked man," archly exclaimed Mrs. Potter, shaking her cigarette at him with playful protest. "One would think you were posing as the wicked baronet of the story-books. What a dreadful sentiment. I really think our conversation has been positively improper. The next time we have a picnic, I shall have to write out a menu of the conversation, like the man in one of Mr. Mallock's books,—all naughty subjects strictly tabooed. Come, Mr. Davenport, let us go and think it out."

This was the signal for a general uprising. The party broke up into little groups of twos and threes, sitting about under the trees, smoking cigarettes, chatting and laughing, or indulging in a semi-siesta. Mrs. Potter, under the shadiest tree, with plenty of cushions, fans, and other paraphernalia, held a little court.

Madeleine took the opportunity of the general

shifting to slip away by herself. She followed a narrow, crooked footpath, which wended upward through the jungle, and soon found herself on a little plateau, which opened out a splendid view over the valley and the pine-clad hills. Here she sat down at the foot of one of the heavenward-stretching pines. The warm air was full of its resinous odour. The hills, in the near distance, seemed striving against one another, pushing upward one against another, as though measuring their strength. Beyond them, far away, the snow-crested Himalayas rode on in their majesty. Their grandeur awed her—these everlasting hills. The sense of God's greatness, of man's littleness, rushed over her as she gazed at them. The frivolous chatter she had left below was all forgotten, even the two great sorrows of her life—her husband's unkindness, her child's death—fell into the background.

"God," she whispered, "what am I, that I should murmur at my cross? Help me to bear it to the end."

She was so wrapped up in her thoughts that she did not hear a heavy step ascending the footpath behind her. A shadow fell across the sward, and looking up, she saw Sir John Bradford.

"What! all alone, Mrs. Dampier?" he cried gaily; "surely that speaks badly for the gallantry of our young men, to—"

"There are times when one likes to be alone, Sir John," she broke in, nipping the florid compliment in the bud. "I am used to my own society—and here, one is not alone," she waved her hand towards the hills, "with these grand beauties of nature."

She could not keep a faint ring of annoyance out of her voice. Why should this man dog her steps like a shadow? His presence filled her with a vague fear.

If she thought he would take the hint she was mistaken. He sat down—not without difficulty—at her feet, with his back to the view and his eyes fixed in bold admiration on her face.

"The most beautiful thing in nature, in my opinion, is a beautiful woman," he said.

Madeleine flushed with anger. It was too baldly put for her to affect to ignore his meaning.

"Miss L'Estrange is below," she said stiffly. "She likes those speeches. I do not."

It was an unfortunate thing to say: the moment she had uttered it, she regretted it. Sir John took it as an encouraging sign, a token of jealousy,

though nothing could be further from Madeleine's thoughts.

"Miss L'Estrange!" echoed Sir John, with a curious smile; "Miss L'Estrange is charming, but—*toujours perdrix*—you know"—he shrugged his shoulders expressively.

"I beg your pardon," interrupted Madeleine. "I had no right to speak of Miss L'Estrange. It was ungenerous. I regret it. But have you never heard, Sir John, that men only pay compliments to women whom they don't respect?"

"It may be so," he rejoined; "but the truth is not a compliment." Then, noting her impatient movement, he added, "But let us talk of something else—I am sorry. Do you know, Mrs. Dampier, I was much struck with what you said just now about marriage being love—it is the love which makes the marriage, not the marriage which makes the love. Do you not think so?"

"I think," she said slowly—"oh! it does not matter what I think. I was speaking of the ideal. Marriage is too serious a subject to jest about—to me at least."

"I was not jesting," said Sir John; "far from it. How can one, when one sees the unhappy marriages

all round one? They are tragedies, and yet they have in them the elements of a farce. There is no greater injustice, it seems to me, than for a woman to be tied to a man who is utterly unworthy of her—who flaunts his infidelities in her face; there can be no obligation on her part to be true to him—the tie which bound them together he himself has broken.”

Madeleine’s lips quivered—she knew to what he alluded, and she resented the allusion inwardly.

“Two wrongs do not make a right,” she said, with an impersonal air, as though discussing generalities. “If one sins, surely that is no reason why the other should do the same. A man—I grant you—is a coward who thus dishonours his wife, because it is impossible, if she be worthy of the name of wife, for her to avenge herself upon him in like manner. No—no! Marriage is a sacrament. It is the wife’s duty to bear all things, hope all things.”

Sir John gnawed his moustache savagely.

“A sacrament!” he repeated sardonically—“yes, but of the devil’s ordinance sometimes—always, when love is dead—”

“I do not agree with you,” said Madeleine coldly, “I cannot agree with you. Love is an indefinable

term, and so much depends upon the sense in which it is used. That there are many unhappy marriages, I admit; but these are the fault of the individuals rather than of the system. But I would rather not discuss the subject—I, of all others, am the least qualified to give an unbiased opinion. It is a platitude to say marriage is a lottery; yet it is. Because one draws a blank, it does not follow that the lottery is unfair—there must be some blanks, I suppose, though woe unto those who draw them,” she added bitterly.

Sir John edged himself a little nearer.

“Woe, indeed,” he said, and paused. Then he went on earnestly: “Dear Mrs. Dampier—pardon me, if I say too much; but I—I feel for you—more than I can say. You are wasting your young life on a—a man who is not worthy to fasten the latchet of your shoes. Why do it? You owe him nothing—while I—I—”

“Hush! hush!” cried Madeleine, springing to her feet; “you must not say these words to me—I must not listen.”

She was indignant at the man’s intrusion upon her grief. Was her story, then, common property? And yet—it would not do to take him seriously—

she must stop him some other way, before he went too far.

"Sir John," she went on, in a lighter tone, "the day is hot, the champagne cup was excellent—I understand. Now, not another word. Will you let me give you a word of advice?"

"Yes," he said; "yes," and he looked up at her amorously, "I would take even advice from you."

"It is not mine," she said, in the same light tone, "it is Voltaire's, one of your favourite teachers, I know: 'Make love in your youth; in old age attend to your salvation.'"

Sir John shrank back as though struck with a blow. His face was livid with anger. At that moment a "Cooey" sounded down the hill.

"Ah! there is Mrs. Potter calling," cried Madeleine gaily. "Good-bye, Sir John; and let me add to Voltaire's advice a word of my own: don't sit on the grass too long. It is very bad for your rheumatism."

With a laugh, she turned and ran down the path, leaving Sir John to follow at his leisure.

"Damn it!" he said, getting up slowly and mopping his head; "that check was neatly done. She made me look more like a fool than ever I have



done in my life before. I shouldn't have thought she had it in her. And yet, how pretty she looked—the vixen. Never mind, I'll be even with her yet."

Then he descended the hill, to find Madeleine under the wing of old Lady Fitzpoodle and Mrs. Potter, busily arranging a game of hide-and-seek. Sir John attached himself to Miss L'Estrange's seeking party. But instead of seeking, these two went off to some secluded spot, and indulged in a desperate flirtation all the afternoon. So pronounced was it—Sir John being on the rebound—that Laline's hopes rose higher than they had ever done before.

When at last they were hunted up it was time for tea, and when that was over the whole party rode homewards. The setting sun was flushing rosy-red over the snow-capped hills.

## CHAPTER X.

"I WISH you wouldn't fidget so, Laline; you make me quite nervous," irritably exclaimed Mrs. Plunkett-Potter, shutting up her book with a snap. "Good gracious!" as something fell with a crash, "what have you done now?"

It was a few days after the picnic. Mrs. Potter and her niece were sitting together in the little morning-room, trying to while away the hours before tiffin by reading. At least Mrs. Potter had been trying to read. Laline was in a strangely restless mood. She was hardly in the same position a minute together. At first, she made a pretence of skimming the *Pioneer*, but soon exhausted it; then she sat down to write a letter, but before it was half finished she tore it into shreds; then she strummed a bar or two on the piano, but jumped up so suddenly as to knock over the photograph of Mrs. Potter's pet subaltern, which adorned the top. It fell down on the floor with a crash. It was this

last misadventure which called forth a protest. Generally Mrs. Potter was not easily roused, especially in the forenoon; she nursed her energies for later in the day.

"It's only that ridiculous little Davenport," rejoined Laline coolly, picking up the photograph and sticking it upside down so that little Davenport's heels pointed upward to the ceiling. She sat down to the piano and began to strum away again.

"For Heaven's sake leave off that exasperating noise!" cried her aunt. Perhaps it was the contemptuous treatment of the photograph which stung her. "Please attend to me. I want to have a serious talk with you."

Laline's hands came down upon the keys with a crash. She swerved round on the music-stool and faced her interrupter.

"A talk with me?" she echoed, raising her well-arched eyebrows ever so slightly. "How strange! I thought you said the other day that conversation was an art with men only—with women it was a bore?"

"So it is," rejoined Mrs. Potter tartly, "but that doesn't make it any the less a necessity—a disagreeable necessity sometimes."

Laline cast down her eyes reflectively. She scented danger in the air. Suddenly she looked up. "Well," she said. "What is it?"

"You were writing a letter just now?" began Mrs. Potter tentatively.

"I was."

"And to Captain Goring, was it not?"

"Yes; what of it?"

Mrs. Potter resented these laconic utterances. She paused a moment to rally her forces, and then continued with a slight increase of asperity:

"I want to know how long this sort of thing is to go on?"

"What sort of thing? Pray be so good as to be a little more explicit," answered Laline, with crushing politeness. The light of battle dawned in her eyes nevertheless.

"You know quite well what I mean; it is surely unnecessary for me to explain," replied Mrs. Potter petulantly, avoiding her niece's eyes and looking into the fire. "I refer, of course, to your shilly-shallying between that young Goring and Sir John Bradford. It seems to me to go on for ever, and to lead to nothing. It's a long lane, they say, which

has no turning, but this turning seems strangely long in coming."

Laline bit her beautiful nether lip. An angry retort was on the tip of her tongue, but she checked it. She rose abruptly from her seat and crossed over to the window. It was not a cheerful outlook. Heavy rain was falling, and the great pine trees were weighed down with moisture. The garden-path was running with turbid water, and black clouds were hanging low overhead, shutting out completely the distant hills. The girl drummed her fingers on the pane; she seemed lost in thought.

Her aunt watched and waited.

"I think," said Laline at last, without turning round, "that I am quite capable of managing my own affairs. Surely you ought to know by this time that I do not like to be interfered with—and what is more, I will not," she added with a sudden flash.

"I am sure I have not interfered with you," cried Mrs. Potter. "Ever since you came out to India you have gone where you pleased, done what you pleased, flirted with whom you pleased, I have never said a word. It is my rule not to do so. A

great many girls have come out to me, and they have all done well—either gone Home with a husband, or engaged ; and there isn't one of them who can say that I ever meddled unduly—not one. I put matters in train and leave them to take their course. I interfere!—not I!” declared Mrs. Potter, stung with a sense of injustice.

She paused for an answer and sniffed vigorously at her salts. But seeing that her niece remained obstinately silent, she went on again.

“But there comes a time when one is forced to intervene—and this vacillation has been going on long enough—too long, in fact. Everyone is talking about it. Lady Fitzpoodle hinted as much to me the other day—not that I need her hints—I have plenty of means of knowing ; even the Colonel has written to remonstrate. Everyone, he says, is talking down at Dustypore. Not that it hurts a girl much to be talked about in India in a general way. A little of it is even necessary to her success ; it is a tribute to it. It depends with whom she is talked about, and Sir John Bradford has hardly the most savoury reputation. Your name is linked with his everywhere ; you were away with him at that picnic for nearly two hours.

Now this sort of thing can't go on. Does he mean business, or does he not? I fear he does not—it is my duty to warn you. You will get your wings singed if you don't take care."

"Your solicitude is most touching," said Laline with curling lip—"or rather it would be, if it were genuine and I had not heard all this before. Let people talk; what does it matter? They are sure to talk in any case, and it is just as well they should have some foundation for their gossip by way of a change. As for Sir John Bradford, I know all about him—thank you—and I am quite capable of taking care of myself. He has met his match with me."

"I have heard that before; but I never met anyone yet who was his match. A good many women's names have been associated with his, and they have none of them come to any good. He's a most dangerous man. Why, he once nearly compromised *me!*" Laline tossed her head incredulously, but Mrs. Potter either did not, or would not, notice the gesture. "And the worst of it is, one does not like to offend him," she rambled on, "he has so much influence both directly and indirectly—and I have a husband to think of—other-

wise I should have dropped him a hint long ago—in fact, I am not sure that I shall not do so as it is.”

“You dare!” cried Laline, facing her tormentor and emphasising her words with an indignant stamp of the foot. “You dare meddle with my affairs! Do you understand, I forbid you!”

Her voice rose crescendo; she was not the most “lady-like” of young women when roused. She seemed to lose control of herself at the mere mention of this possibility.

“Dare!” echoed Mrs. Potter shrilly, the tip of her nose getting quite pink with anger. “How dare *you*—you ungrateful creature, who owe everything to me—speak to me like that! Drop those tragedy-queen airs at once, and listen to what I have to say! You seem very confident of managing your own affairs, but it doesn’t seem to me that you are. You have been out here now these three years; you have had more chances—thanks to my excellent management—than any girl I know. You have been more talked about than any girl I know. At one time it seemed you would carry everything before you—but you didn’t. Men often flirt most with girls whom they would



least care to marry—or perhaps—well, never mind—the fact remains that at the end of three years you are not married. And I tell you candidly I don't care to be associated with a failure."

"A failure!" cried Laline. The word struck her like a blow.

"Yes, a failure," repeated Mrs. Potter bluntly, noting the advantage she had gained; "there is no other word for it. A girl with your opportunities—and then at the end of three years to have nothing definite but a captain in a line regiment who has nothing but his pay! I call that a dead failure—and so does the world. What between your silly infatuation for Goring, and all this scandal about you and Sir John Bradford, you have made a pretty muddle of your chances. And it's high time you knew it," she wound up vindictively.

"I have no intention of marrying a penniless captain in a line regiment—barracks and a baggage waggon won't suit me. Penniless captains and beardless subs. are created for the consolation of grass widows and old women," she retorted. "Sooner than that, I would rather marry no one."

"It may end in no one," said Mrs. Potter, now

thoroughly roused. "You'll lose even that chance through your headstrong folly, if you don't take care. I wouldn't have said so three years ago—a year ago even—but now you might do worse than take him—much worse. Some other girl may come to the front soon, and then you will be nowhere. After all, I'm told Captain Goring's a smart soldier, and he may rise—though promotion's slow enough in all conscience if a man has no money—and he's fairly well-born; there's a baronetcy in the family, I'm told, and he may come in to it. Who knows? Stranger things have happened."

"There are two healthy lives between him and the baronetcy," said Laline, as if wrestling with herself. "No—I am not going to wait on the off-chance of slipping into dead men's shoes; I'm not going to wait until all that is worth living has ebbed out of my life."

"Then what do you intend to do?" remonstrated her aunt impatiently. "You can't keep him dangling on for ever; it keeps other men off, and, besides, he won't put up with it. You had a letter from him this very morning—you were trying to answer it just now—you needn't contradict me—I know it."

"I have no intention of contradicting you," rejoined Laline defiantly; "why should I? I never tell lies except when it suits my purpose, and it would hardly be worth my while to lie to you. The letter was to tell me that Captain Goring is coming up to-day—he may be here by now."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Mrs. Potter, in alarm. "Things are coming to a crisis with a vengeance. You can hardly shirk an explanation; he's sure to be at the Club dance to-night, and so will Sir John Bradford. Well—you must go your own way. Between the two stools you will come to the ground. I wash my hands of you. You will have to go Home."

"Home!" said Laline to herself blankly. She knew what that meant. The dilapidated Irish castle—all houses of any size are castles in Ireland—away in the wilds of county Limerick; her father's eternal grumblings about his unpaid rents, his everlasting squabbles with the priests and the Land League; her mother's fretful efforts and disastrous failures to make both ends meet; a herd of half-grown brothers and sisters, who tore about the place like wild colts, and called her "Lal"; a second-rate regimental dance once a year in

Limerick, if she could get to it, or a hop at some penniless squireen's, or scarcely more flourishing land-agent's once and again,—these would be the only breaks. So she would go on, year in and year out, until all her beauty was wasted and gone, and she was hopelessly on the shelf. Ugh!—she shuddered inwardly at the thought of it.

“Well,” said her aunt again. She had been noting the effect of her words. “Well—again I ask, what do you intend to do?”

“Do!” flashed Laline, fairly driven to bay. “Why, what I have always intended to do, marry Sir John Bradford.”

“Humph!” ejaculated the elder lady with a shrug of her shoulders. “That is easier said than done, I fancy. Sir John is much too old a bird to be caught in a hurry—and from what I saw the other day he seemed very much taken with that Dampier woman, and the odious husband eggs him on—a bad sign; your influence may not be so great as you think.”

“That Saint Nitouche!” exclaimed Laline scornfully, showing her hand. “Do you think I shall let her stand in my light? Why, with her ridiculous prudery she is sure to have a row with him before

long ; I shall catch him on the rebound. I mean to be Lady Bradford, I tell you. I know I am playing a dangerous game, but the stakes are high, and I mean to win them. Do you think I don't know the meaning of the look in that old satyr's eyes ? I know it well enough, and it is on that I shall play. But he will have to pay the legal price for me. He has wealth, power, and position ; I mean to share them—were he twice the old reprobate he is."

" Really, Laline ! " exclaimed her aunt, half in admiration, half in deprecation, " what shocking sentiments ; I believe you would sell your soul for money."

Her niece laughed bitterly.

" My soul ! " she said ; " don't you think we had better leave our souls out of the question—you and I ? No—I am not going to sell my soul, that is scarcely a marketable article—but I am going to sell myself—and the price I ask is a wedding ring. He is mistaken if he thinks that I shall take anything else. I know my value."

" Really, Laline," protested her aunt again, " what a coarse way you have of putting things. I call it quite indecent."

She took refuge in her salts, and lay back languidly as though her niece's vulgarity were quite too much for her. Mrs. Potter cherished her illusions.

"Bah! the truth is always coarse," said Laline recklessly. "Let you and I face it for once—it will be at least a new sensation, as Sir John says. You asked me what I intend to do. I have told you. I am going to sell myself like many another woman whom the world caresses, and not unlike many whom the world shuns. I do my own bargaining; I show off all my points for his inspection and approval. What matter? It is done every day. If he buys me, the bridal veil will shroud the bargain with sanctity."

She paused a moment breathless, and then smote her hands together in a passion of self-scorn. Her voice rose almost to a cry.

"And I do all this—I—I—when all the while I love another man with every fibre of my being. Surely—surely it were better to be even the unlawful mistress of the man I love, than the lawful wife of the man I loathe, and I do loathe him—ugh! his very touch is pollution to me—his leer—"

"I will hear no more," interrupted Mrs. Potter,

recovering herself with an effort. "I am ashamed of you; such language, such sentiments I have never heard; I don't approve of them—I will listen no more."

She rose with an air of dignity to leave the room, but her niece was too quick for her. With her hand on the handle of the door, Laline faced her with glowing eyes.

"You shall hear me out," she said; "don't waste your airs of mock virtue on me. Keep them for those who pretend to believe you. I know too much. What I am your vile teaching has made me; when I am married I shall follow your example doubtless—if I can. It is largely to escape from you that I am doing this. Faugh! I am sick of it all—the lies, and the backbiting, and the scandal, and the shame—and yet, sick though I am, I am going to perpetrate the greatest shame of all—I am going to sell myself to Sir John Bradford."

"If you can," retorted Mrs. Potter viciously, white with anger, "if you can—don't be too sure."

But the Parthian dart was lost on Laline. She had shut the door upon herself, and her retreating footsteps told her aunt that she had gone to her room.

"Dear me," said Mrs. Potter when she had recovered a little from the tempest, and addressing herself to space, "was there ever such a creature? I wonder if there *is* anything definite between her and that old Bradford, or whether it is only bluff after all? One thing, she'll meet her match if she does catch him. He'll tame her fast enough, and serve her right. Well, I shall be glad to wash my hands of her—the ungrateful minx! Good gracious! it is nearly two o'clock, and Bertie Davenport is coming to tiffin. What a wretch I look. I must positively go and titivate a little before he comes. I wonder if he is really going to buy me that cob of the Fitzpoodles'?"



## CHAPTER XI.

It was a hot sultry evening—hot even for Dustypore, with the thermometer 110° in the shade. The rains had set in, but there had been a break for some days. Heavy black clouds covered the sky in one dull opaque mass ; the air was so thick that even breathing was attended with a certain amount of difficulty. The roads lay inches thick in dust. The few parched leaves that clung on to the bare brown trees along the roadsides hung withered and motionless.

Goring, still detained at Dustypore, rode up to the club from the tennis courts.

There were one or two men lying limply about, smoking in long armchairs in the verandah, with iced pegs by their sides. They nodded a feeble “good-evening” to him as he entered.

“Hi! Kitmatgar, get me a whisky peg with plenty of ice,” he said, turning to one of the club servants, “and bring it outside into the verandah.

. . . . . Hullo! Wilton, taking it quietly, I see!" he exclaimed as he noticed a shock of hair peeping up from behind a *Pioneer*.

"Yes," replied the other, languidly lowering his paper; "I feel like a piece of chewed string in this heat. It takes all the 'go' out of one so infernally. What have you been doing?"

"Knocking the balls about at the tennis courts. I think we're going to have a storm presently. It is fairly cool in here, but outside you can almost cut the air with a knife. I think the verandah is cooler. Ah! here's my drink. Come along. Kit-matgar, bring it out here."

Goring slowly made his way out to the verandah, and flung himself into a long chair at the end of the row, some little distance from where the others were sitting.

It grew darker and darker. Presently a blinding flash of lightning shot across the sky, followed immediately by a crash of thunder. Then the rain poured down in torrents.

Just as the storm was at its height, two men entered and seated themselves in chairs close to Goring. They did not notice him in the semi-darkness, but he recognised one, a Civil Engineer whom

he knew slightly. The other man he had never seen.

"Well, we just managed that in time," said the man he knew, as they seated themselves. "I did not think we should do it, and we should have been drenched to the skin in this down-pour. So you've just turned up from Elysium. How is everything going on up there?"

"Pretty much the same as usual," replied the other. "I wish I could have stayed up longer. Would you mind touching that bell for me? Thanks. Yes, we've been having picnics, and dances, and all that sort of thing. I was at a picnic the other day, given by Mrs. Potter—you know her, of course—she is the wife of old Potter who commands one of the regiments here."

"I remember her years ago up at Simla. She had just passed the age of discretion, and was the rage up there. She has been growing younger and less discreet ever since. I would not be surprised to see her turning up in short frocks, with her hair down her back, one of these days."

"Yes? Well, her frocks are short enough now, but they shorten from the neck downwards, instead of upwards."

"Ha! ha! But tell me about the picnic. Who was there?"

"Let me see," said the Under-Secretary, for he it was; "oh, yes! old Bradford was there—the old scoundrel, and—oh! here you are, bearer—go and get me a cheroot—and Bradford was going it very strong with Laline L'Estrange."

Goring half moved to get up, but the temptation was too strong. He felt that it was playing rather low to listen to the private conversation of these two men, but we all play low sometimes, even the most upright among us, and he wanted to learn about Laline. Two or three rumours of her escapades had reached his ears, and he wished to hear an outside opinion, quite forgetting that it is in the faults and failings of friends that gossips fatten and batten. He received the reward he deserved, and the one which his common-sense might have told him to expect. He sat straining every nerve to catch what followed, though the constant peals of thunder constantly interrupted his hearing, and the incessant rattle of the rain muffled the voices.

"Yes," the man continued, "old Bradford is going very strong with 'la belle Laline,' and they say—

well, you know what people do say on these occasions. They go everywhere together, and the last dance I was at she sat out half the evening with him. You know old Bradford is not given to wasting his time on these occasions, and he never goes to dances except to stalk game. Latterly, however, he has rather taken to a Mrs. Dampier—she also, I believe, comes from here—and he and Dampier, the husband, are as thick as thieves—they play *écarté* by the hour together—and they say Dampier is very lucky at cards—especially *écarté*; but old Bradford is hardly the sort of chap to lose his tin without a *quid pro quo*. . . . . No, I think I will have one of these trichies if I may—a light—thanks. All the other fellows are going it strong. Davenport—you know Davenport—won the cup given the other day for tent-pegging, and in the Ladies' Tilt-ing, the L'Estrange won a rippin' ruby bracelet. It was given by old Bradford. It was a foregone conclusion from the first. Everyone knew she'd get it, and I heard a woman say that 'Sir John might have had the decency to adopt a less public manner of throwing the apple.' However, we shall see what we shall see. It's diamond cut diamond. The L'Estrange is quite able to take care of herself,

but she's nuts on Bradford. . . . . What do you intend doing about these estimates? Atherton says . . . . ."

Goring had heard more than he bargained for. Sick at heart he rose to go. Only that morning he had received a letter from Laline which he had at that moment in his pocket, full of protestations of love, and vows of eternal fidelity. This was how scandal said she was behaving in his absence. Where there was so much smoke there must be some fire.

His emotions were not enviable. But with a certain grim sense of justice he felt that he had brought it on himself by stooping to listen.

Later on the same evening, at mess, the colonel told him that he was looking very seedy, and he jumped at the remark as a possible means of finding out the truth. The next morning, he put in an application for ten days' station leave, and to his astonishment and delight it was granted.

"Now," he said to himself, "I will find out what truth there is in all this. I will go to the fountain head and ask Laline what it all means."

Two days later Goring arrived in the early morning at the little railway station at the foot of

the hills. He secured a seat in the mail tonga, and was soon travelling up the cart-road as fast as the tonga-ponies could gallop.

For the last two days, and during all the journey, he had been thinking matters over. The more he thought, the more he wondered how he could have allowed himself and Laline to drift on in the way they had done without coming to any definite conclusion. At one time he would read over the letters he had received from Laline, pages and pages of thick Bath post, and call himself a brute for doubting her, and a mean cad for listening to irresponsible statements made by comparative strangers and probably superlative liars. Of course, a peerless girl like Laline would get talked about, praised and abused, and men would naturally cluster round her like flies round a honey-pot. Yes, there was no doubt he was a brute for thinking ill of her. At another time many little incidents of which he had thought lightly at the time flashed back upon his memory. In the light of subsequent stories these bore a very different aspect. They would force themselves upon him, and then he would wonder how he could have been such a fool as to allow himself to have been made a plaything to

suit the caprice, or vanity, of a heartless coquette. Then he would swear horribly, and utter awful curses anent the sex generally, and Laline in particular. The upshot of it all was that he made up his mind to come to some definite understanding one way or another.

He knew his way about Elysium, for he had been there on leave before. When he arrived at the final stage, at the foot of the hill, just below the church, he lost no time in getting coolies for his baggage, and made his way to the hotel.

After he had had a tub and made himself presentable, he sallied forth full of the doughty resolve to "have it out" with Laline. He had written to say he was coming, so that everything would be plain sailing. When at length he came down the little side path which led to the porch in front of the Potters' bungalow, he did not feel so sure of himself, and almost wished he had not come.

He had reckoned without his hostess. The bearer informed him that neither of the ladies were "at home," and that he didn't know when they would be at home. Goring was nonplussed. This was a simple turn of affairs which had not entered into his calculations. Yet it was just the sort of



thing which the astute Laline might have been expected to do.

There was nothing for it but to wait. He could hardly kick his heels on the Potters' doorstep for hours. As he was wondering what he should do to kill the time, a bright idea struck him—he would go and see Mrs. Dampier. She would probably tell him much of what he wanted to know.

Upon his arrival at the Dampiers' bungalow he was at once shown into the little drawing-room. Madeleine was genuinely glad to see him. But she declared herself sorry to see him looking so pulled down and worried. Perhaps she made a shrewd guess at the reason.

"I only arrived this afternoon by the mail tonga," he said, in response to her inquiry. "I have just been up to see Mrs. Potter, and I'm sorry that neither she nor Miss L'Estrange were at home. I hope neither of them is ill?"

"I don't think Miss L'Estrange is ill; I saw her out riding this morning. She was looking in rude health."

"With whom was she riding?"

Madeleine looked down at the floor.

"She was riding with Sir John Bradford."

There was an awkward silence, during which Goring cursed Bradford in his heart. Then he said bluntly :

"Does she go about much with Bradford? You will forgive me asking you, but you know how—how fond I am of Lal—of Miss L'Estrange. I have heard a lot of things about her, and about him, that I don't like, and—I know you will tell me."

Madeleine remained silent for some minutes, and still regarded the floor. She was very indignant with Laline, and intended to tell Goring the truth. But she wanted to break it as gently as possible. She answered ambiguously.

"Well, Captain Goring, Miss L'Estrange is a girl who likes admiration, and Sir John Bradford admires her a good deal. I think it a pity that she should allow their names to be coupled—in the way people do couple them. But you know she is very careless of conventionalities, and Mrs. Potter is hardly the wisest adviser for a girl to have."

Goring had heard enough. He understood all that was implied in this brief speech. He bowed his head on his hands.

"I wouldn't have minded so much if it had been anyone else, but a brute like Bradford," he said presently. "Great Heavens, it is enough to drive a fellow mad; the worst of it is I am powerless to interfere. There is no acknowledged engagement between us."

"I am truly sorry for you," replied Madeleine; "more sorry than I can say. I can sympathise with you; I do sympathise with all my heart. As for Sir John Bradford, do you know I simply loathe the sight of him. He makes me feel frightened whenever he comes near me, and I shudder whenever he touches me. The worst of it is my husband and he are great friends, and he is always here. So you see you are not alone in your trouble."

"I heard something about it down at Dustypore—at the club—but then one never believes what one hears at the club," said Goring, forgetting that it was club gossip which had brought him all the way up to Elysium.

Mrs. Dampier flushed. Was her name bandied about at the clubs?

"It is true that he has been trying to force upon me his odious society, and, when I let him see how I dislike him, it seems to add fuel to the fire; but

nothing more," she exclaimed indignantly. "My husband wishes me to be civil to him, and that makes it the more difficult for me to shake him off. I suppose it all comes in with one's life, and must be gone through," she added bitterly.

There was a sound of voices outside, and an outburst of laughter. Madeleine looked up with a start as the door opened and Dampier, accompanied by Sir John Bradford, entered the room.

"Talk of the devil," said Goring, beneath his breath.

"Ah! Madeleine," exclaimed Dampier in a jocular tone, "Sir John is going to relieve our dulness by dropping in to dine with us to-night, before the dance, and—Hullo! is that you Goring? I never saw you—When did you turn up? . . . . Captain Goring—Sir John Bradford. . . . Oh! Madeleine, Sir John has come to ask you to ride with him this afternoon. I told him that I thought you would be delighted."

"If Mrs. Dampier would honour me," said Sir John, grinning.

Mrs. Dampier had risen, and was standing rigidly in front of the fireplace, with anything but a delighted expression on her face.

"I am afraid," she said, addressing her husband, "that Sir John must excuse me. I do not feel inclined to ride to-day. I am going down to the courts presently."

"Nonsense, Madeleine; I am sure a ride will do you far more good. I know she is keen on it, Sir John, but women love to be urged to do anything. Now, run and put on your habit. . . . I've ordered them to saddle your pony," he added, in a lower tone.

There was a covert menace in his look as he said this, and Sir John Bradford redoubled his entreaties. Madeleine looked helplessly from one to the other.

"I think I will be going," said Goring to her, as she turned to obey her husband's command. "Good-bye, Mrs Dampier. I hope I may see you soon again."

There was a world of sympathy in his cordial handshake, but Madeleine was too bewildered to notice it.

Goring had noted everything, and the horror of the thing drove, for one moment, even the thought of Laline's infidelities from his head.

“What an infernal cad Dampier is,” he thought to himself, as, with a curt nod to the two men—which Sir John did not even trouble to acknowledge—he took his leave.

## CHAPTER XII.

THE Elysium club stood out in a blaze of light at the foot of the slope leading from the church. Here and there, all over the sides of the surrounding hills, little lights danced up and down as the *syces* carried lanterns before their sahibs and mem-sahibs, on their way to the dance.

The large dining-room of the club had been turned into a ball-room for the occasion. The floor thereof had, for the last three or four days, been undergoing a severe course of preparation—of bottling, waxing, and French chalk. It now shone like a mirror. The corridors and verandahs had been partitioned off with curtains and plants, so as to form a number of artfully contrived dimly-lighted *kala-jugahs*.

The “magnificent band” of the 111th (Prince Heinrich Von Seidlitz’s) Regiment was in attendance. Elysium had already mustered in force, and every moment brought reinforcements.

Strains of the first dance were pealing out into the night, telling those who were late that the dance had begun. Goring, who had come betimes, was leaning against the wall, in a corner of the room, moodily stroking his moustache, and keenly watching the arrivals. Suddenly his eyes fell on her for whom he waited. Laline and Mrs. Potter, the latter gorgeously garbed, entered the room. Laline was immediately surrounded by a swarm of men clamouring for dances, but Goring lost no time in elbowing his way through the throng. Their eyes met for a moment; he fancied he saw in hers a shade of defiance—but it was only for a moment.

She greeted him with a cordial nod and smile.

"I've kept three for you," she cried laughingly, as she was whisked off by her partner, who did not relish losing half his dance.

Goring watched her in the crowd of dancers. How lovely she was; how superbly she moved. All previous doubt and resentment faded from his mind, and the old love crept back to his heart again. What if she had been amusing herself a little in his absence? He would forgive her everything—everything, if only he might take her in his arms again,



and feel her lips meet his. She caught the look in his eyes, as she passed him in the dance, and smiled. She knew that her task would be easy.

The room was now full of people. As Goring made his way along he caught sight of Mrs. Dampier. She had just come in, with Sir John Bradford in close attendance. She was wearing a very pretty grey dress, and was carrying a bouquet of white roses. But her face was whiter than the roses.

On the way to the dance her husband, coming alongside of her *jam-pan*, had said to her :

“I wish you to be civil to Sir John Bradford. You were sulky at dinner. I’m sorry you don’t seem to take to him, for he’s a useful man ; there are lots of women who would only be too glad to be civil to him. As I have said before, it is necessary to my plans that you should keep him in a good temper—absolutely necessary, so no more of your damned airs, if you please.”

So Madeleine was letting Sir John Bradford write down his name on her card against four dances—not that he ever danced, that would have been bad enough, but he insisted on sitting them out with her, which was worse. He had just given her back her programme when Goring came up.

"I'm not dancing much this evening," said Madeleine, in answer to his request, "but put your name down by all means—against as many as possible; you needn't claim them," she added in a whisper, with a glance at Sir John.

"Come, Mrs. Dampier, let us go over to that settee at the other end of the room," put in that worthy, who was impatiently hovering around. "We can watch the dancing better from there."

"Is it worth watching?" asked Madeleine wearily. "I hardly think that an ordinary waltz realises one's idea of the poetry of motion, does it?"

But she allowed him to lead her away all the same.

"Well I don't know," said Sir John, seating himself by her side. "I rather like watching other men dance. They look such fools—look at that man there, throwing his legs about like a Chinese puzzle. If he only saw himself as we see him, nothing would induce him to dance again. And yet, I know the man—he's really not a fool, except when he's dancing."

"Is that the reason why you never dance?" Madeleine asked with a smile as she looked at the grotesque figure squatting by her side.

"Some years ago I went to a dance. Providentially, a row of mirrors ran round the room. I saw myself then, and forswore dancing. But look, there is old Lady Fitzpoodle in an animated conversation with Mrs. Potter. See how they beam and smirk at one another. They hate one another really. But they have struck up an alliance for offensive purposes only. I am sure they are demolishing some dear friend's character from the enjoyment on their faces. Boadicea has probably scented out something delectably nasty about someone. To the virtuous, you know, everything is vicious. And Lady Fitzpoodle, we all know, is virtue incarnate. It would be an insult to masculine taste to suppose her otherwise."

"What a low opinion you seem to have of human nature, Sir John," replied Madeleine, with a forced laugh. Was this man going to shoot at her his ponderous epigrams all the evening? "I don't believe you give anyone credit for—"

"For being what they are not. That is true, Mrs. Dampier. I generally look upon my fellow-men as fools or knaves until I find they are not. And it is very seldom that I am wrong. Now you

I am sure, look on your friends as altogether delightful, until you find them out. Don't you think my plan is the better of the two—for surely it is much nicer to be agreeably disappointed than unpleasantly taken in."

"You assume too much; I have very few friends, and I have never been unpleasantly taken in by any of them; after all, it very much depends on oneself," said Madeleine nervously, playing with her bouquet. "There is quite enough of the disagreeable element in the world without going out of one's way to look for it. You apparently look for the bad side of things, and, naturally enough, you find it. You must have had an unfortunate experience, for you seem to have no faith in anyone."

"I have not," he rejoined drily. "Faith is believing, or trying to believe, that which you feel to be absolutely untrue. The more impossible a thing is, the greater the faith. That is also religion. But we are getting much too serious. . . . I see Lady Fitzpoodle levelling her pince-nez in this direction. Here she comes. She has stalked us down. . . . How d'ye do, Lady Fitzpoodle? I am rejoiced to see you looking so well. But then you always look well; how do you manage it, I

wonder? Mrs. Dampier and I have been having an animated discussion concerning the qualities of our friends."

"Not their good qualities, I am sure," said Lady Fitzpoodle, with a sour smile, ranging herself angularly like a soldier shouldering arms. "I think people are most unkind; scandal is a thing I am always careful to avoid," she added, sniffing the air. "But I *must* say Mrs. Potter ought to be more careful in the way she goes on with that young Davenport. Do you know, I saw her disappear into a *kala-jugah* with him quite early in the evening. A mere boy; she is old enough to be his mother. And the way she wheedles presents out of him too. She ought to be ashamed of herself. I caught sight of her card just now, and there was nothing but a row of D's all down it."

Sir John Bradford gave a short laugh.

"I think Mrs. Potter is delightful," he said, knowing that to praise the fair Potter to Lady Fitzpoodle was like waving a red flag to a bull; "her age has nothing to do with it. Women are no older than they look; years have no effect on her; she has not changed in the least since I first knew her, and that was—I am afraid to say

how long ago. She was then just as skittish as she is now, or perhaps not so much so. Her colour is a trifle fresher maybe, but what would you have?"

"Well, I call painting a most disgusting habit," declared Lady Fitzpoodle, looking down complacently on her goose-flesh arms. "I think it is absolutely indecent the way that woman paints herself. It can only be done for one purpose—"

"And that?"

"To decoy those silly boys. It is disgraceful."

The music stopped.

"So endeth the second dance," said Sir John, as the final bars died out. "Lady Fitzpoodle, we will continue our interesting conversation in our next."

The ball-room emptied rapidly. The dancers sought out the cool verandahs and corridors, leaving only a few people, mostly chaperons, sitting about in the corners. But the silence did not last long, for the band suddenly struck up a lively polka, and everyone trooped back into the room.

"Shall we go outside into the verandah, Mrs.

Dampier ? ” asked Sir John, with an inviting leer.

But Madeleine was spared a refusal by her partner appearing to claim her, and Sir John had perforce to resign his position.

## CHAPTER XIII.

THE hours, even in a ball-room, sometimes dance with leaden feet, but since even the most laggard steps trend towards their goal, so, in spite of the apparently never-ending probation, Goring's dance with Laline at last came due.

His eyes had followed her with jealous admiration all the evening. He was prejudiced perhaps, but even to eyes less blinded by passion than his, Laline's beauty was notable. Once or twice, in the course of a dance, when she paused to enable her partner to get a breath—dancing never seemed to have the slightest effect on her—he caught her eyes resting on him. It was a fleeting glance, which passed in a second, but brief though it was it sent him into a seventh heaven of delight.

"Come," he said, when at last he came to claim his dance. "Let us sit out; I have much to say. I will show you a place where we can talk undisturbed, a splendid *kala-jugah* which very few here



have discovered. I came over here this afternoon, when you turned me away from your door," he went on reproachfully, "to help them to decorate the place—or rather to kill the time—and I made up this *kala-jugah* myself."

"With an eye to the evening?" she asked, laughing, but a little nervously withal.

He nodded.

They came to a small conservatory at the end of one of the passages, with some *phulkaries* draped over the door.

"We can't get in there," he said; "that is the beauty of the place. We must come out here, and we slip in by a side door from the path."

They entered the little conservatory. The door was open, but a heavy curtain hung across it.

Inside, a solitary Chinese lantern threw a dim fantastic light on the many-coloured hangings with which the walls were draped. They seated themselves on a low divan, covered with a rug of silver-fox skins.

"This is really delightful, Kenneth," cried Laline, clapping her hands with well-feigned astonishment and delight; "how did you manage to build a cosy nest like this? and for me too—how sweet of you.

It is so beautifully hidden away. The very air seems suggestive of lovers' trysts and privy conspiracy."

She omitted to mention that Sir John Bradford had brought her to this very place a little time before. It would have destroyed the illusion, and it wasn't necessary. She nestled a little closer to Goring as she spoke, and lifted her face invitingly to his. She felt a little nervous as to what he might say next, but she trusted to propinquity to work its spell.

He did not seem in a hurry to respond to the gesture.

"That is a very pretty bracelet," he said coldly, taking her hand in his and looking at it critically. "I suppose it is the one that old Bradford gave you?"

"Yes. I won it as a prize at tilting," she replied quietly. "All the other women were green with envy. I suppose one of them told you about it. It's awfully pretty, isn't it?"

Her soft answer turned away his wrath. The witchery of her presence was beginning to tell on him again.

"I wish I could afford to give you presents like that, Laline," he said jealously.

He slipped his arm round her waist, and still held her hand.

"You silly boy," she whispered, nestling up to him with a soft laugh, "you will have quite enough to do with your money when we are married, without spending it now. If Sir John chooses to be so kind—and so silly," she added as an afterthought, "as to waste his money on bracelets, that is no reason why you should do so. Quite the reverse. I know you love me, and your love is more precious to me than rubies."

Her eyes were full of soft light. Her head leant against his shoulder. He drew her closer to him—closer. Their lips clung into a kiss. The faint sounds of a waltz floated in through the heavy curtains. The *kala-jugah* was transformed into an enchanted bower.

In spite of Laline's avowed determination to marry Bradford, and her contemptuous sneer to her aunt about the folly of becoming the wife of a penniless captain in a line regiment, notwithstanding her level-headedness in all matters which affected the ultimate disposal of herself, there was one factor which she had left out of her calculations. Deep down in her nature, hidden beneath the crusts

of selfish ambition, of keen appreciation of the world's ways, and of hard experience in her short dealings with them, lay a strong vein of impulse and passion, which was only kept dormant by the artificial restraint which she had put upon herself. Her indifference, her contemptuous disregard of those qualities which form so large an element in most women's lives, was purely and simply a matter of education and environment. Her natural emotions were all the other way.

"How long is this going to last, Laline?" said Goring presently, breaking the silence. She was still leaning against him, her bosom heaving, her eyes half-closed. She looked up into his face dumbly. She felt his hand tremble as he continued. "Do you never think what it is to me to be kept away from you as I have been—to meet you by stealth, and every kiss a stolen one? It can't go on. For both our sakes, tell me—let me have a definite answer now—may I give out our engagement, and put an end to all this double dealing?"

If marriage were not an affair of church, cake, canonical hours, and all the rest of it, she would have been married then and there—but—there is always a "but" in these cases—it was past mid-

night, a most uncanonical hour—and the church was far away on the top of the hill—and they were in a *kala-jugah*, with some hundred and fifty people dancing a few yards away.

All Laline's artificialities and ambitions were for the nonce laid aside, all the vague dreams of a brilliant future, of a rich husband of title and position—everything was forgotten, except that she was in the strong arms of the one man in the world whom she loved, and who loved her. With a little quivering sigh she hid her face in his breast.

"It shall be as you wish," she whispered. And she meant it then. How sweet are the words of truth whispered by the lips of love. The gods laugh, it is said, at lover's lies. They must have a merry time of it.

When some time later Laline and Goring found their way to the supper-room, they came across Sir John Bradford and Lady Fitzpoodle still hard at it. Both had been rather more than supping, and had demolished at least a dozen reputations, and two bottles of champagne. Sir John looked up at Laline as she entered. There was a bright flush on her cheek, and she was wreathed in smiles. An unmis-

takable light shone in Goring's eyes. His face wore a look of ineffable content.

"So the kitten has been at the cream again," Sir John muttered maliciously, "and she has hardly finished licking her lips. There is room here, Miss L'Estrange," he said aloud; "the ball-room is too hot for anything. Dancing has deepened your delicious roses," he added with a little laugh.

Lady Fitzpoodle bridled and waggled her plumes.

Goring looked furious at this impertinence, but Laline laughingly replied :

"Dancing's much better for one, Sir John, than sitting about in draughty passages as you have been doing. Fie! I shall tell Sir Augustus I saw you and Lady Fitzpoodle out in the garden; you'll both have bad colds to-morrow."

"Lady Fitzpoodle and I are much too careful of our healths and our reputations to risk them as you suggest," answered Sir John, with mock gravity. "Are we not?"

"Speak for yourself, if you please, Sir John," snapped Boadicea, severely, tossing off the rest of her champagne. "From what one sees, sitting-out seems to be the principal object of these dances. It was very different in my young days."

"It is very shocking, very shocking indeed," Sir John responded, shaking his head. "The world is sadly degenerate, and this particular little corner of it most degenerate of all. But morals, they say, are simply a matter of climate."

"I am sure whoever said that must have been thinking of India—and of Elysium in particular. Don't you think so, Lady Fitzpoodle?" cried Laline. "It's not so warm up here; we have both climate and company; but just think how dreadful it would be if we were all given over to icy virtue. The sinners are much more amusing than the saints, don't you think?"

"They are striking up a new dance. Will you kindly take me into the next room, Sir John?" said Lady Fitzpoodle, ignoring the remark and rising with dignity.

"Ah, here comes Lord Kilkenny," exclaimed Laline presently; "our dance, I think—yes—I have quite finished. Well, ta-ta, Kenneth; shall meet again before the evening is over. Don't forget the extras."

By the time her dance with Lord Kilkenny was over, and he had given her a tip for Viceroy's Cup—Lord Kilkenny's tips were always straight—when

intended—the recent fit of tenderness that had swayed Laline during her half-hour with Goring began to wear off. She almost repented having given herself away. As her reasoning faculties came into play, the dreary realities of being a poor man's wife flitted before her mind again. She knew them well. They would have to save money for her to go up to the Hills for the hot weather—if she could get there at all—and the prospect of going Home was more appalling still. And how she would be snubbed as the wife of a poor man in a line regiment. Even if they scraped up enough to get home on leave, they would have to hack about at a third-rate watering-place, or Kensington-beyond-Jordan lodgings, and count every penny they spent for the remainder of their lives. In India her whole life would be centred in the regiment, such as it was. She would have to listen with pretended interest to the news that Jones thought of sending in his papers, or that Brown was going on the staff. Her husband would have to give up polo in order to marry her, exchange one luxury for another in point of fact.

Lord Kilkenney, who had had many tender passages with her, found her now positively dull, and



confided to one of his boon companions later on that "the L'Estrange filly was going stale—hang it!"

But she wasn't thinking of Lord Kilkenny just then.

"Oh! what a fool Kenneth is, not to be able to see things in a proper light," she thought, as she mechanically answered Lord Kilkenny's sallies. "Why does he insist on marrying me? Why can't he see that with marriage all our illusions will disappear? And it might be so different; we might help each other so much more if he would only—but he won't—it's no use."

Meanwhile Goring was sitting an unconscionable time at the supper-table, where Laline had left him, mechanically consuming bumpers of the gooseberry-and-petroleum which did duty for champagne. There is a theory that people may be too happy to eat, but Goring demolished the drum-stick of a stringy old hen with relish. His success gave him quite a fillip. He looked at his card by-and-by, and asked a man sitting near him the number of the dance which was going on now. He found that his card was vacant for the next two dances, then Mrs. Dampier would be his partner, then two

more vacancies, and then, once more, Laline and all the extras. He felt in the seventh heaven, a state of mind partially due to Laline, and partially due to the gooseberry. He wanted to tell someone very much, though probably no one wanted to listen. He would tell Mrs. Dampier. Mrs. Dampier was the sort of person who was always supposed to sympathise with other people's joys, probably because she never had any of her own. In the meantime he would stroll into the card-room and see what they were doing there. It would make the time go quicker.

In the card-room there were two lots of people playing whist and smoking like furnaces, and in a corner, through the dense smoke, he caught a glimpse of Dampier plucking a pigeon at écarté. One of the whist parties had just finished a rubber when Goring entered, and he was asked to "cut in" as one of the four had to go. He thought it would be a good plan to kill the time, and took a hand. When the rubber was over, he found to his disgust that half the dance Mrs. Dampier had promised him was already through. He hurried to the ball-room, and was relieved to find the object of his quest talking earnestly with another woman, as though she had

forgotten his existence. What else could she do, poor thing? Surely he didn't expect to find her looking out for him like Mariana in the "Moated Grange?" He was profuse with his apologies, which she accepted with a certain amount of frigidity. She was but human after all.

"Do you mind sitting-out?" he said, as they moved away.

She did mind very much, for she had been sitting-out nearly all the evening, but she said she didn't.

"I have some splendid news to tell you," he went on; "I know you will be glad. Come, I will take you to my own pet *kala-jugah*, where we will be able to talk undisturbed." On the way thither—he couldn't wait till he got there—he told her that he was definitely engaged to Laline, and that she had promised to marry him as soon as the necessary arrangements were completed. Madeleine had hardly time to put her congratulations into words—or to decide whether it was a matter for congratulation or not—when they reached the *kala-jugah*.

As Goring lifted the curtain they heard certain osculatory sounds from within, and a smothered voice—Laline's voice—say laughingly :

"Don't, Sir John, you are crushing my flowers. . . . . How rough you are. . . . . There, that will do—surely."

For a moment Goring stood motionless—transfixed—with Mrs. Dampier on his arm. The occupants of the *kala-jugah* were far too intent to notice the intruders. Then Laline, hearing a movement in the doorway, and seeing the *purdah* move, pushed Sir John away, and sprang up and confronted them. Sir John sat tight. For a second—a second only—they faced one another. Then Goring muttered, "Well I'm damned!" and dropped the curtain.

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Dampier," he said contritely as they turned away. "I forgot myself. More than that, I find I have made a mistake. I was a little hasty in what I said just now," he added, with a short hard laugh, as they turned into the verandah. "You must forget all about it. We are all liable to make mistakes sometimes, even the wisest among us—is it not so?"

Madeleine did not speak. She only put her hand on his arm in mute sympathy. She could feel him trembling, the dim light of the lanterns were not so dim but that she could see he was white to the

lips. Her woman's instinct told her that the man wished to hide his pain, and just then any words of hers would but add to it.

So they stood side by side in silence. It was a positive relief to them both when the band struck up again, and they could go back to the ball-room.

He left her there and went off to the smoking-room. It was almost empty. He ordered a drink lighted a big cheroot, and sat down to think it out. His thoughts all brought him round to the same point.

When his next dance with Laline came round, he went up to her and claimed it as though nothing had happened.

"Will you come outside?" he asked quietly. "I have something to say to you."

She took his arm without a word. The crisis had come at last. Well, she must face it.

"Why have you treated me like this?" he said slowly, when they stood together on the gravel path under the stars—"but we will not discuss it. I suppose you know best. It's no use crying over spilt milk--and so ends our story."

"The pity is that it ever began," she said bitterly, in a stifled voice.

"I agree with you," he broke in curtly, "if—"

But she waited to hear no more. She turned on her heel and left him.

## CHAPTER XIV.

THE big clock in the club dining-room had just struck the hour of 10 a.m. Captain Dampier was leaning back in one of the long arm-chairs in the verandah, smoking. He was gazing fixedly at the distant snow-capped peaks now dazzling white in the bright morning sun. To one who was not acquainted with Captain Dampier it would have appeared that he was admiring the beauties of nature, but he was not given that way. Nothing was further from his thoughts.

A crisis had arrived in his affairs which rendered his continued sojourn in the East most undesirable. But getting away from India—or from anywhere—is no easy matter, when other people are interested in your remaining. To put it shortly, Captain Dampier was meditating a bolt, and how to make the bolt without unnecessary fuss was occupying his mind now. He had already arrived at a possible solution of his difficulties, but it was

dangerous, he thought, very dangerous. Success meant freedom, but failure might mean penal servitude. He had no money to speak of, and, unfortunately, one cannot bolt without it—not even Captain Dampier. He could sell his horses, but to do that would raise suspicion. Money he determined to procure somehow or another, and when it is absolutely necessary for men of Captain Dampier's type to have money, they do not stick at trifles to get hold of it.

"Yes, I must chance it," he muttered between his teeth. "I'll go the whole hog, and trust to Madeleine to keep old Bradford quiet after—when I have cleared off. I see no other way. I wish he would turn up—ah! here he comes, the old devil."

"The old devil" was riding down the road at a fast trot, and as he turned into the compound gate, a syce, who had been crouching at a corner of the verandah, sprang up and went forward to hold his pony.

"Mornin', Dampier," he exclaimed, in a cheery voice, that jarred on the other's mood. "I hope I haven't kept you waiting. Your wife and I have had a delightful ride. I saw her home and came



on here. Come, let us go in and get some breakfast, and after that we will get to business—business, business,” he repeated, with a laugh.

He was in an excellent humour, for Madeleine had been bullied into being amiable to him at last. Her husband had told her bluntly that if she offended Bradford in any way it meant absolute ruin to him. He did not go into explanations, but merely stated the fact. She, poor woman, was so frightened that she braced herself up to the effort, and made herself so amiable and charming, that Sir John was on the point of asking her to ride with him to Clarkson’s—the great Elysium jeweller—to choose a bracelet. He only hesitated because he thought it might do better to-morrow.

There were several others in the breakfast-room when the two men entered. Breakfast in India is on much the same line as “*déjeuner*” in Paris. Unlike the gloomy meal at Home, it is a convivial feed. The feeders were discussing the last dance, and the forthcoming races.

“You are entering two or three animals, aren’t you?” said one of them to Dampier.

“Yes, I have three brutes, of sorts, running,

but I don't think any of them will have much of a chance."

"Tell that to the handicappers," replied the other, with a laugh. "What do you think, Sir John? Dampier's swans seldom turn out to be geese."

"They will this time, as you will see," retorted Dampier, with an indifferent shrug. If his plans turned out as he hoped, he would be a thousand miles away before the races came off.

"I see Goring of your regiment has turned up," said a man who had not spoken. "I wonder if there is really anything between him and Laline L'Estrange?"

"If by 'anything' you mean matrimony, I think you are doing great injustice to Miss L'Estrange's mental attainments," Sir John Bradford broke in with a laugh. "With all deference to the charming lady in question, I think she undoubtedly knows her value in the matrimonial market," he chuckled—"and that her price is above rubies I know to my cost," he muttered to himself.

By-and-by the other men finished their breakfast and went into the verandah to smoke. Sir John and Dampier were left alone.

"Now I think we can get to business," said Sir

John, turning his chair sideways so as to face Dampier. "I always make a point of watching a man's face when I'm doing business with him," he once said.

"Well, the matter stands like this," said Dampier, looking down. "You owe me two hundred over écarté, and you are to give me three hundred for a half share in my horses' winnings during next week's races, taking all risks. This of course is a private matter between us. That makes five hundred."

"Yes, that makes five hundred," repeated Sir John, slowly. "Have you finished breakfast? Well, the only thing for me to do is to pay up and look pleasant. When you have finished your peg we will adjourn to my rooms, and I will give you a cheque."

Dampier swallowed his peg forthwith.

"Nice little quarters these, eh?" said Sir John, as they entered his rooms.

Dampier glanced round the room carelessly, and seated himself.

"Yes; you know how to make yourself comfortable."

"I always make myself comfortable wherever I

am," rejoined Sir John, unlocking his despatch-box and taking out his cheque-book. "I bank with the branch bank here," he went on, as he was writing out the cheque, "so you won't have any trouble about getting it cashed."

Dampier was perfectly aware of the fact.

"Yes, it saves trouble," he replied indifferently. "Thanks,"—taking the cheque—"five hundred—that's right—I shall see you again this evening. I must be off now."

After Dampier had gone, Sir John carefully selected a cheroot from his case, and lighted it meditatively.

"Now, I wonder what game he is up to?" he said to himself. "I am sure he's up to something by his manner. He's too damned subdued. He had better not try any of his tricks on with me. I must keep an eye upon him."

When Dampier arrived at his bungalow, he found his wife in the verandah, busy with some needle-work. He greeted her civilly, almost affectionately. "I am going to shut myself up in my room for an hour or two," he said. "I have some important business to do, and I am not to be disturbed on any account. Will you tell the servants to say, if

anyone—no matter who—comes, that I am not at home ?” . . . . .

About two hours later, Dampier came out of his room. He called for his pony and rode to the bank.

“ Will you take it in five hundred rupee notes, sir ?” said the native cashier.

“ I would like two five hundred notes, and the rest in one hundred, except five hundred rupees, which I’ll have in silver. Perhaps you’ll kindly put them in a bag and send it out to my syce, who is holding my pony outside ?”

“ Very well, sir,” replied the cashier, and he counted out the money as he was bidden.

Dampier rode straight back to his bungalow.

“ I have just received a wire at the club,” he said to his wife. “ I shall have to go down to Dustypore by the mail-tonga to-morrow. I will put up the things I want myself.”

“ Shall you be away long ?” she asked.

“ Oh no, dear. Two or three days at the most. It is an awful nuisance, but I suppose I must go.”

He hadn’t called her “ dear ” for so long that she looked up at him a little uneasily.

"I am going down to the course presently, and shall go on to the club after. By-the-bye, I am dining at the club to-night, but I shall probably be home early."

There was a sort of suppressed excitement about his manner. She looked at him again, more curiously this time.

"What the devil's up with you?" he exclaimed irritably. "Why do you look at me like that?"

"There is something strange about you," she replied anxiously. "I do not know what it is, but you—I hope there's nothing wrong?"

"Wrong! of course not. What should there be wrong?" he echoed with a jarring laugh. "Here's the pony, so I will be off."

"Before you go, Wortley," she said, detaining him, "will you give me a little money for the housekeeping expenses? There is the *dhobie* and the *durzi*; neither have been paid for last month, and there are several little outstanding house bills besides. The tradespeople come up every day and worry me. They sit in the verandah for hours—and won't go away."

"I have not five rupees in the house," he replied; "I'll pay them on my return. Tell them that I

shall be back in a few days and will settle then. I can't stay any longer."

He turned and left the room, and, mounting his pony, cantered up the road leading to the race-course.

## CHAPTER XV.

SIR JOHN BRADFORD was standing in the club verandah leisurely drawing on his gloves. It was a little after four o'clock in the afternoon of the same day. He was going up to the Potters' bungalow to tea, and for a ride afterwards with Laline. The everlasting syce was leading the everlasting pony up and down outside.

As he was about to mount, a red-belted *chuprassi* came up with a letter, and, salaaming profoundly, handed it to him. Sir John looked at it carelessly, and was about to put it in his pocket unopened; but, on second thoughts, he tore open the envelope and read the note.

It was from the manager of the branch bank, politely informing him that he had overdrawn his account to the extent of three hundred rupees, five annas. He re-read it, and thought it must be a mistake. However, since it made a difference of some thousands of rupees to him, he determined to



investigate the matter at once. He went back to his room. He never did anything in a hurry. The first thing he did was to take out his cheque-book, and to go carefully over the counterfoils. The second was to sit down and write a little note to Laline, regretting that he was prevented from riding with her that afternoon by circumstances which he would explain later. The third was to mount his pony, and ride off to the bank.

He sent in his card to the manager, and was admitted immediately to that individual's sanctum.

"I have just received a letter from you," he said, "stating that my account is overdrawn. There must be some mistake, so I came up to see what it is."

"There is no mistake, Sir John, on our part," replied the manager urbanely. "The last cheque of yours that Captain Dampier cashed for five thousand this morning—"

"Five thousand!" exclaimed Sir John—"Oh! yes, I was forgetting. Would you mind—er—letting me look at the cheques I have drawn during the last day or two, all that you have not sent down?"

When the cheques were brought in, Sir John

looked carelessly at one or two until he came to the cheque which he had that morning given to Dampier. He examined it attentively. "Very well done for an amateur," he thought to himself. "I didn't know the fellow went in for this sort of thing. So that's his game!"

"Thank you," he said aloud, handing back the cheques. "It was my mistake. Pray forgive me for troubling you—good evening."

He rode very slowly up to the Dampiers' bungalow in deep thought. When he drew rein in front of the porch he had quite made up his mind as to his future course of action.

"How d'y'e do, Mrs. Dampier?" he said, with a grin which showed all his teeth. "I called to see your husband. Is he at home?"

"He went off to the race-course about an hour ago," she answered.

"I wonder if she's in the swim?" he thought, looking at her attentively. "As likely as not. She looks so damned demure."

"He said he would be going to the club on his way from the course," she added coldly. "I am going out."

"Many thanks," he replied politely. "I won't

detain you. I daresay I shall meet him at the club."

About an hour later Dampier rode up to the club with another man. They were laughing loudly over a story which Dampier had culled out of the last mail's "*Pink 'un*."

As he dismounted he did not notice a man seated in the far end of the verandah with his legs thrown over the long arms of the chair, furtively watching him over the top of the pages of a *Pioneer*.

"Come along, Collins," he cried boisterously, as they entered the club, "there is time for two hundred up, and I don't hear anyone in the billiard-room. Hi! Bearer, call the marker, and bring two whiskies-and-sodas sharp."

"May I have a few minutes chat with you, Dampier, before you begin?" said a quiet, suave voice behind him.

It was quite three seconds before Dampier turned round and confronted Sir John.

During that time he felt like a rat caught in a trap. All the colour flew out of his face, and he gripped the back of the chair in the intensity of his emotion.

"Ah! Sir John," he said, with a supreme effort,

"I didn't know you were in the room. Certainly—if Collins does not mind waiting a few minutes—but I should like a peg first, if you don't mind. I have a raging thirst after those gallops. You know that little mare of Brentwood's?" he continued, talking very fast; "we saw her do a gallop over five furlongs, and by Jove! she *can* spin. I think she'll be rather a good thing—don't you agree with me, Collins? and by Jove!—ah! here's the peg—"

He gulped it down in great thirsty throbs. Sir John stood by, smiling serenely the while, as he watched his victim's throat expand and contract with each gulp. He was enjoying the whole business immensely, and was looking forward with keen pleasure to the next half hour.

"Perhaps he doesn't know anything about it, and I am frightening myself about nothing. He may only want to talk about the horses," thought Dampier, as he followed Sir John to his rooms.

When they had seated themselves, and the door had been carefully closed behind them, his doubts were quickly dispelled.

"Do you recognise this interesting work, my dear Dampier?" said Sir John with a snarl, picking up a

thin green volume from the table, and holding it out to him. "I thought so," he continued, as the other's face turned livid. "I have just been refreshing my memory with it. It is some years since I had anything to do with the Indian Penal Code. The last case that I tried, if I remember rightly, was one of forgery, and, I think—I am not positively certain, for one's memory is treacherous at times—I believe I sentenced the—the—'felon in the dock'—that is the correct expression, is it not?—to—to ten years' penal servitude."

He smiled as if he were recalling some pleasant reminiscence, and cheerfully drummed his fingers on the arm of the chair. Dampier sat rigid and grey, but no word came from his lips. After a pause, Sir John continued, if possible more suavely than before, and watching the man opposite him warily the while:

"Now you are no doubt wondering what on earth all this has to do with you, and you are no doubt anxious that I should come to the point. Well, the point is, my dear Dampier, that I happened to drop into the bank this afternoon, and found to my amazement that I had drawn a cheque in your favour for five thousand rupees, and I have really

no recollection of having done so. So I naturally come to you for an explanation."

Sir John paused politely, but no explanation was forthcoming. Dampier glowered, but said nothing. He was waiting for the other to further show his hand.

"Pray do not look at me so savagely," said Sir John at last; "I don't like it, and it can do no possible good. I may as well tell you before we go any further, that no one but myself knows anything about this business, so far; but—but knowing the great temptations of—er—criminals to hide one crime by committing a greater one, and knowing to what lengths a desperate man will go on the off-chance of saving himself—I have taken the precaution of writing a history of that cheque of ours, which is now in a sealed envelope in—well, in good hands. I merely did that as a safeguard. And now—to come to the point—what do you intend to do?"

It was some minutes before Dampier spoke. He was turning the situation over in his mind, and, with something of the calmness born of despair, he was wondering what would be the upshot of it all. Denial was useless. Escape was impossible. He

must face it. He cleared his throat, and said in a low, husky voice :

“I—I haven’t touched the money—and you can have it back again.”

“That goes without saying,” replied Sir John blandly. “It is very good of you ; I am duly grateful, for five thousand rupees is a large sum to lose.”

“What the devil do you want ? I don’t see what more I can do,” said Dampier savagely.

“Possibly not,” replied Sir John drily ; “but I do. It has always been a rule with me never to forego an advantage.” He grinned horribly. “I have the advantage of you now, and I mean to use it. I hold in my possession that which can send you to penal servitude. I have no particular wish to send you to penal servitude, but I shall do so without hesitation unless you agree to my terms. Of course you could kill me ; you would, no doubt, like to do so. I can see it in your face ; you should really try to hide your feelings more carefully. But that would hardly mend matters, for you would simply exchange a prison for the gallows. There is a way out of it—but it is for you to decide.”

“Decide !—how can I decide ?” echoed Dampier

hoarsely. "I'm absolutely at your disposal. You've got me under your heel. You know it—so do I. For God's sake, drop these preliminaries and come to business. What is it you want?"

Sir John Bradford took a turn up and down the room before replying. Considering how completely this man was at his mercy, he seemed to hesitate strangely. He cleared his throat once or twice, and then, drawing up a chair, sat down opposite Dampier, and began. . . . .

The shadows closed in with a rush.

By the time Sir John had finished, the two men could scarcely see each other's faces. They spoke rapidly and in low tones. . . . .

Dampier got up to go.

"To-night, then," said Sir John.

"To-night," echoed Dampier curtly, and without more ado he went out and slammed the door behind him.

"Damn him!" he muttered, as he strode towards the billiard-room; "if it ever comes my turn—well, it might be worse—"

Collins was still waiting in the billiard-room. With many apologies for not turning up sooner, Dampier called for a peg, and they began their game.



“He was always a good player,” Collins said afterwards, when talking the matter over in the light of subsequent events, “but I’m hanged if I ever saw him play in such brilliant form as he did in that game.”

## CHAPTER XVI.

MRS. DAMPIER was sitting in the drawing-room of her little bungalow, alone. The servants had gone to bed, and she had meant to follow their example, but she felt strangely restless to-night. She had dined alone—she nearly always dined alone now—and had spent the long evening trying to read. But the book had slipped from her hands to the floor, and she was looking idly into the fire, and thinking idly. Her thoughts worked themselves round to her husband. He was dining at the club as usual. She didn't regret his absence—far from it; it was rather a relief to her; neither was she sitting up for him—she had given that up long ago. He might stay out all night and every night—she cared little. His presence brought restraint, his absence brought relief. She rendered him outward service, but her heart was far from him.

As she thought of him now a little line of perplexity furrowed itself across her brow. That

things were not going well with him she knew—how badly she did not know, for, though he hinted darkly, he never took her into his confidence. The last few days, and to-day especially, there had been something very strange about him. He had been restless and uneasy, and his uneasiness had communicated itself to her. He was going away on the morrow—he had mentioned it casually, but whither he was going she did not inquire. He had been very mysterious about it. Why had he—who hated all physical exertion—insisted that he would pack his portmanteau himself, instead of letting the bearer do it, as he had always done before? Why had he locked the door of his room so carefully before leaving the house? Why, most of all, had he, despite his irritability, been so unusually amiable to her? He had actually called her “little woman”—a term of endearment she had not heard from his lips for years—not since when? She had cast her mind back and tried to remember. Oh! yes, it was just before she had signed the power-of-attorney which had handed over her little fortune to him. The thought brought a bitter smile to her lips; the furrow of perplexity on her forehead deepened. What did it mean? Did it presage some new evil?

There was a faint sound outside. The noise made her heart beat. She was in a strangely tense mood to-night. She crossed to the big glass doors that opened on to the verandah, and dragging aside the curtain, she looked out. A full moon rode high, and the wide champaign lay stretched out before her as clearly as though it were day, more clearly almost, for the shadows were more sharply defined. Across the valley yonder the distant slopes of the hills, dotted with mud huts, and patched with clumps of pines, could be clearly seen.

She was about to drop the curtain and go back to the fire and her book, when suddenly the dark figure of a man came between her and the moonlit country—came so suddenly that he seemed to spring from the ground at her feet.

She drew back with a spasm of fear. At the same time the man put his hand on the handle of the glass door and tried, ineffectually, to open it. He knocked. Thinking it must be her husband, Madeleine rallied herself and opened the door.

“Oh, Wortley, how you frightened me!” she exclaimed. “What have you done? Why do you come in this way?” Then in a moment she saw

her mistake. The man who stood in the doorway, blinking like an owl in the bright lamp-light, was not her husband, but Sir John Bradford.

"Pray pardon me if I startled you by coming in this unconventional way, Mrs. Dampier," he said, advancing a few steps into the room and shutting the door behind him, "but I—"

"Is not this rather a somewhat unusual hour to call, Sir John?" she said, still standing. "There are limits to unconventionality, even in India—but," with a sudden thought—"perhaps you bring bad news—my husband? Is he—"

"Pray don't alarm yourself, my dear lady," said Sir John, a little nettled at her tone. "Your husband's all right—at least I believe so; it was to meet him that I came here. He made an appointment with me at eleven o'clock to talk over some business which brooks no delay. I happened to catch sight of you at the window, and so took the liberty of coming that way. I'm afraid I'm rather late," he added, glancing at his watch.

Madeleine stood before the fire and looked at him doubtfully. She knew there was something between this man and her husband, and also that the

latter did most inconsiderate things—inconsiderate so far as she was concerned. Otherwise— She looked at the intruder again. His little eyes were very bright, there was a red flush across his face. He was in evening dress, and he seemed to have been dining not wisely, but too well.

“You came so suddenly,” she said half apologetically. “At first I thought it was some *budmarsh* lurking in the verandah. My husband is at the club—at least I believe so. He may be here any minute. I was expecting him.”

“Oh, no doubt he’ll be here in a minute. May I pull the curtain across?” he asked irrelevantly; “the nights are still so chilly.”

She bowed her head mutely, still standing. A vague sense of disquietude stole over her.

He drew the curtain closely, and then pulled up a chair opposite to where she was standing.

“Do sit down and talk to me for a minute or two until Captain Dampier comes,” he said pleadingly, sitting down himself as he spoke. “It seems quite a long time since we had a chat together.”

Mrs. Dampier sank down into her chair without speaking, and looked thoughtfully into the fire—anywhere to avoid those rattlesnake eyes.

"It is very late indeed," she said presently, after an uncomfortable pause; "I wish Wortley would come back. It is very wrong and inconsiderate of him to make an appointment with you like this, and not to be here to receive you."

"I have it in my heart to forgive him," said Sir John, with a swift glance. Then seeing that she was still contemplating the fire, he went on, "I suppose he's in the middle of a rubber, or something of that sort, and can't get away to the minute."

To this Mrs. Dampier vouchsafed no reply. It was clear that she resented his intrusion, and yet—His glance wandered over her stealthily. She was looking very pretty to-night in spite of the almost dowdy dress—a sort of tea-gown—which she wore. Excitement had lent a transitory flush to her cheeks, and the firelight played on her hair and her white neck. She looked up and caught his glance. He lowered his eyes instantly, but not before she had caught a light in them which made her instinctively recoil. Had the man been drinking? He certainly seemed in a very strange mood to-night.

There was an awkward silence.

"Ahem!" said Sir John, rubbing his hands softly over his knees. "Ahem!"

Madeleine guessed that these sounds were intended to herald a remark, so she rushed into the breach. A sense of the ludicrous smote her.

"I am afraid I am very dull to-night," she said with a smile; "but the truth is, I am feeling very tired. I have been reading myself sleepy over this," and she picked up the novel at her feet. "Have you read it?" holding it up to him. "Everyone is talking about it."

She felt desperately that she must talk about something. The situation was becoming unendurable. She had never known the man at a loss for a word before. What ailed him?

"Oh, yes—I dipped into it last night—I don't often read novels, but this interested me," he said garrulously. "Let me see, what was it about? Oh! I remember. There is a man in it who throws away everything—wealth, rank, satisfied ambition, for the woman he loves—another man's wife! There are men who will do that, believe me."

He edged his chair a little closer, and leered at her with his little pig's eyes. He tried to look amorous, but only succeeded in making himself



ridiculous. But Madeleine did not see the ludicrous side just now. She caught the look which accompanied his words and shuddered inwardly. She had seen something like it before—in her husband's eyes. She controlled her voice with an effort. It sounded almost harsh as she answered with a forced laugh :

“You have got hold of the wrong book, Sir John; I don't remember anything of the kind in this one.”

“But don't you think that there are such men?” he insisted, not in the least nonplussed.

“I don't know,” rejoined Madeleine, yawning with assumed carelessness. “The thing many men call love is born of an extra glass of champagne, I think, and evaporates as quickly. But come, Sir John, don't grow sentimental; it doesn't suit you. Tell me what horses will win in the meeting next week. You must mark my card for me, and I will put a little money on the totalizaler; I am sure your tips will be worth following.”

“I shall be delighted,” he said, gnawing his thick under-lip, and looking anything but delighted all the same. “But you have not answered my question, Mrs. Dampier—at least you have evaded it.”

"Your question?" she said lightly. "What was it? Oh, I remember. Well, like Miss L'Estrange, I hate discussing abstract theories, so we'll talk about something else."

"But this is not abstract, it is very concrete, very real," he said, his voice gruff with excitement. He got up from his chair as he spoke, and picked up the book from the table, then he put it down again, and pretended to examine the trinkets on a little table near. He edged round it gradually, every movement bringing him nearer to her side.

She watched him curiously, half-furtively. Red patches stood out on his face, and she noticed that his mouth was working, and his hands were shaking. Her sense of insecurity—that there was something not right—deepened. She looked at the clock.

"I am very tired, Sir John," she said, with a little yawn; "I think if you will excuse me I will retire. My husband will be back in a few minutes, I am quite sure, and if you do not mind waiting here alone—"

She rose as she spoke, and would have moved towards the door.

"But I do mind," he broke in, his voice gruff with

emotion. "It is you that I have come to see, and not your husband—he won't be here for hours—I have something to say to you that has been on my mind for some time—you must know what it is. I love you—more than I could think myself capable of loving—I would give up everything for you—"

The words were jerked out spasmodically. His breath came in short pants—he seemed to have lost control of himself.

She looked at him with eyes wide with astonishment and indignation. She thought he must have gone mad, then that he was drunk. Suddenly the whole business struck her in a ludicrous light. Here was a man old enough to be her father, and an ugly man to boot, gravely making love to her. Age is never so ludicrous as when it is amorous.

She almost laughed in his face, and was about to turn the matter off with a jest and leave the room, when, misinterpreting her silence, with a sudden movement he caught her in his arms, and tried to press his mouth to hers.

With a little cry she tore herself from him, and, gathering all her strength, struck him across the

mouth with her hand. Her rings cut deep into his lip.

For a moment they faced one another. He livid, shaking with baffled desire and impotent rage, while the blood from his cut lip gathered itself in a little clot and trickled down his chin. She erect, defiant as an angry Juno in her outraged virtue and her outraged pride, her eyes shining, her face flushed, every nerve quivering with repulsion.

"How dare you—how dare you!—you mean coward!" she cried. "Let me pass—and never set foot in my house again. How dare you! If my husband had been here—"

"Your husband!" he echoed with a coarse laugh. "It is your husband who has delivered you into my hands; he's keeping out of the way on purpose. And by G—d, I'll—"

He strode towards her as he spoke, and intercepted her exit by the door.

Seeing that means of escape cut off, she rushed to the long glass windows and tore aside the curtains. She had just time to pull back the bolt, when he was upon her, and caught her by the wrist. With a supreme effort she dragged open the glass door; her cry for help rang out upon the night.

Bradford, who was almost beside himself with passion, and with the fear of an open scandal, put his hand across her mouth and tried to drag her from the window. He had almost succeeded, for she was well-nigh fainting with terror, when suddenly a man ran down the garden path, and dashed into the verandah.

A second later Bradford lay sprawling on his back on the floor, with his head mixed up with the broken ornaments of the table he had carried over in his fall. His victorious assailant stood over him like another Perseus, looking from the dragon to Andromeda in mute amaze.

. . . . .

"What is it—what has happened?" Goring asked, keeping a wary eye on Bradford, who was slowly pulling himself together.

For the moment Madeleine was too agitated to speak; she had sunk into a chair in a half-fainting condition. But presently her words came in little short gasps.

"Turn that man out of the house," she said, pointing to the discomfited figure who was squatting toad-like upon the floor, looking from one to the

other with malignant eyes. "His presence is an offence to me—I cannot breathe in the same room with him. He has insulted me grossly. Thank Heaven, you came when you did. Ah! if my husband had come back, he would never have dared—"

"Your husband!" cried Sir John, with a brutal laugh. He picked himself up slowly, and edged towards the window, watching Goring out of the corner of his eye. "Your husband!" he shouted, "is a—is a scoundrel and a thief—he tampered with my cheque this morning, altered it to five thousand rupees—and by G—d I'll have him arrested to-morrow! He sent me here to-night—you know it; I see it in your face—sold you to me; you were to be the price of his freedom. This is how you keep your bargain! I believe you're all in the swindle, you and your bully there too! But I'll make you smart for it—I'll—"

Goring made a swift movement, and cut short his sentence in the middle. Bradford was too quick for him; he bolted through the verandah, and down the dusty road, outside. Goring did not attempt to follow him further than the compound. He found several white-robed figures, aroused doubt-

lessly by the noise, flitting about outside in front of the verandah.

After he had driven them away, he came back to the room.

He found Mrs. Dampier still sitting in the chair. But all the weakness seemed to have left her. She was sitting erect, tense, rigid; her hands grasped tightly the arms of the chair. Every vestige of colour had left her face; her eyes were dilated, and in them there was a new light dawning—a light in which horror, anger, incredulity, strove for mastery. She seemed unconscious of Goring's presence, for she looked beyond him, as though she saw him not.

"Sold!" she muttered; "the price of his freedom—I—Oh! my God!"

"Come—come, Mrs. Dampier," said Goring, soothingly, "you mustn't believe that brute's lies. You are frightened—over-wrought."

She turned her eyes upon him without changing her position. Eyes tell the truth though lips may lie, and in his she saw that he believed that Bradford's words were partly true, and that the man she called her husband was an accessory to this vile thing.

He instinctively avoided her gaze, and went on hurriedly and somewhat irrelevantly.

"I have been dining at the club with a man. I was going back to the hotel when you cried 'Help!' I was on the road just above your bungalow when I heard it. I ran down as fast as I could—and—well, I think that brute Bradford will have reason to remember it. I only wish he had been a younger man—but his age makes it worse. However, no one need know anything about it; that will be the wiser plan; and Bradford's sure to keep quiet. He must have been drunk or mad. And now I don't think it will be well for me to stay any longer—I had no idea it was so late," he said, looking up at the clock; "but before I go, I will fetch one of the servants from the quarters—they were here a minute ago—and make him sit in the verandah until your husband comes home."

Goring went out to fetch the servant, and purposely lingered a little time outside. It would give her time to pull herself together; she was hard hit—and no wonder—she had been insulted, betrayed. What on earth would happen now? He felt that anything he might say would be out of place, and



there was nothing he could do. His interference would only make things worse for her. And yet—there was nothing he would not do if he could. As he had stood before her to-night—the brave little woman who had struggled on so pluckily in spite of all—a new feeling, something more than pity, something stronger than admiration, something deeper than the sympathy he had always felt for her, stirred his heart. And with it came an intense loathing and contempt for the man who, by the law of the Church and the law of the land, was her husband—for the man who had violated every vow, had forfeited every right, had heaped on her every cruelty save that of absolute physical violence—and who yet was her possessor.

“The servant is in the verandah,” he said, when he came back; “I have told him to stop there until the sahib returns. And now I think you had better go to bed and try to forget all about this. You must let me come round and inquire how you are in the morning. Good-night!”

“Good-night,” she said mechanically. “Thank you.”

His hand trembled in hers, but she did not notice

it, nor did she meet his eyes. Her mind seemed wholly absorbed with something else. He left her there, with that look of frozen horror still on her face.

## CHAPTER XVII.

AFTER Goring had gone, Madeleine remained as he had left her, motionless and rigid, trying to think out the events of the last hour. It could hardly be called thinking; her ideas were not connected enough for that. She was conscious only that the cloud, which had lowered over her head so long, had burst at last—and she was stunned with the violence of the bursting. Through all the turmoil of her thoughts, the parting words of Bradford beat upon her brain: "*Your husband is a scoundrel and a thief . . . . he sent me here to-night . . . . he sold you to me; you were to be the price of his freedom.*"

She found herself repeating these words again and again with strained insistence, "*He sold you to me.*" The charge of theft she hardly thought of, the sense of personal outrage was so strong. Here was a blacker depth which swallowed up everything else. Her soul rose in revolt against this crowning infamy; if it were true, then the cup of

her husband's iniquities was full. And that it was true, she did not for one moment doubt. Liar and coward though Bradford was, there was a ring of truth in his voice which compelled her to believe. Goring believed it too ; she saw it in his face. As she turned it over in her mind, every circumstance conspired to force the damning fact upon her ; little links pieced themselves together in the chain of her memory, half-forgotten words, veiled threats, covert innuendoes, all rose up out of the past and bore witness to the truth. "*He sold you to me.*" Oh, infamous ! This was the man who had sworn to cherish and protect her, who was bound to her by the most sacred ties—ties which he had broken. All his past ill treatment and infidelities faded into nothingness beside this.

Yet she was bound to him, she was his, "to have or to hold," until death should part them.

No, there could be no law, either of God or man, which should force her to live with such a man as this. The crisis had come at last, and, awful though it was, she could almost find it in her heart to thank God that, at least, it would bring her respite from a life of degradation. The sanctity of marriage ! What a mockery it was. For

the first time, there came a whisper to her heart that above all the duties she might owe to her creed, her husband and the world, there was a higher duty still—her duty to herself and to her womanhood.

It might have been an hour, or less, she knew not—there are some phases in our life of which minutes and hours are hardly adequate measures of time—when on her ears there smote a sound from the adjoining room. Faint though it was, she knew its meaning, and the blood surged back to her face. She arose and straightened herself like one who awakes from a swoon. The supreme crisis of her life had come, and she went to face it without a shadow of wavering. The sense of a great wrong emboldened her.

She crossed the little passage and tried the door of her husband's room. It was locked, but the sound of a stealthy movement and the glimmer of a light from within told her that he was there.

She knocked. There was no answer. She knocked again.

"It is I," she said. "I wish to speak to you."

Dampier unlocked the door and glared at her suspiciously. His face was heated and flushed with

drink and exertion, but he was sober. He was in his shirt-sleeves. An open portmanteau lay on the floor; he had been packing, and there were some charred papers in the grate.

"What the devil do you want?" he asked savagely, but in a hushed voice. "Come in, if you are coming, and don't stand there like an image."

She came in, and, shutting the door noiselessly, stood with her back against it. For a second their eyes met.

"So you are going away," she said, with a glance at the burnt papers in the grate. "It is well. . . . . I have something to say to you before you go."

He looked at her again, curiously this time, wondering how much she knew. He was struck by the unnatural quiet of her manner. Her face was white and drawn; little lines had cut themselves around her mouth and across her brow.

"If it's about that old brute, Bradford," he blustered, "you can spare yourself the trouble. I know all that you can tell me. I met him on my way home from the club; he was furious, foaming at the mouth, and vowing vengeance all round. The game's up, thanks to you and that interfering fool, Goring. You've made it pretty hot for me,

I can tell you, with your damned prudery. I told you to be civil to the old brute—and this is the result. You've ruined me, and yourself into the bargain. It's too hot for me to stay here. I'm off to-night."

He turned his back on her, and began to strap up his portmanteau. If he meant this as a hint for her to go, it was lost upon her. If he expected a torrent of reproaches, he was mistaken. The words she strove to say were slow in coming. In truth, she was aghast at this man's baseness. The silence was oppressive.

He locked the portmanteau with a snap. The action roused her to speak.

"It is well that you are going," she said again. "I only hope you may escape. I will not detain you long." He looked up at her suddenly when she said "escape," but she went on in the same quiet tone. "You have heard what has happened to-night. It will save me the shame of telling it. I have heard what happened this morning—about the cheque. Sir John Bradford told me that—that his intention to insult me to-night was known to you. Is it true, or not?"

He winced a little at her words. She knew all then? But he pretended not to understand.

"You speak in riddles," he said impatiently, "and I have no time to guess them. If that's all you have to say, you might as well have left me alone. Can't you see I'm busy? I must be off; a coolie is waiting for me up above. I can't be hindered listening to your squabbles with Bradford. I won't be mixed up with them. He's in an infernal rage as it is. Your lover, Goring, got you into the scrape, and he must get you out of it. It's no use your whining to me."

She flushed, stung to the quick by this brutal insult. Her calm vanished for the moment.

"Coward!" she cried, "and liar to the last! Do you think that I came here to ask *you* to defend me—you, who plotted my dishonour? I heard the truth from that man's mouth. I see it in your preparations for flight, in your face, in your manner. But I will hear it from your own lips. You owe it to me."

Her words rang out on the silent room. He made a threatening movement towards her. But she did not flinch. It was the first time he had seen her like this; it would not do to push her too far. He paused for a moment, and looked at her and cursed her in his heart. His hand dropped



to his side. His one object was to escape as quietly and as quickly as possible. She was between him and the door; he did not wish to use violence.

"Come, come," he said, with a forced laugh, "be reasonable, and for God's sake don't make such a noise; you'll rouse the bungalow. There's no need for us to quarrel. You know I didn't mean what I said about Goring, and as for that old scoundrel Bradford, you mustn't believe all he said either. . . . It's quite true I did a silly thing this morning—a man does lose his head sometimes when he's hard pressed, and I've been very hard pressed of late. I tampered with a cheque he gave me, and he found it out. . . . I couldn't afford to have a row with him, and I trusted to you to keep him in good humour. He was always a bit sweet on you, you know, and he'd got me under his thumb, so when he suggested coming to see you to-night, I offered no objection. I knew you could take care of yourself if you wished, and if you didn't wish—" with a shrug of his shoulders, "well, what of it? Why, half the women in India—"

She stopped him with a gesture of disgust. She had crossed over to the fire while he was speaking,

and put one hand on the mantelpiece for support. The anger and excitement faded out of her face, and gave place to the set look again. She rallied her energies with an effort, and her voice was quite quiet when she spoke again.

“It is enough,” she said slowly; “I understand—I understood from the first. You cannot palliate what you have done. Let us speak plainly, since, God helping me, this is the last time we shall ever speak to one another. By your own admission, you—but it is too shameful to speak of. You knew what manner of man he was—you knew that I was at his mercy in this lonely house—I, your wife, the mother of our dead child. . . . I cannot forgive this outrage; all the rest is nothing to it, nothing. Now, listen. I have been your wife for six years; through good report and evil I have done my duty. In what measure you have repaid me only you and I know—and God, who knows all things. I would have stood by you in your trouble, in your poverty, aye, even in your crime. I would have helped you all I could, for you were my husband, even though love was dead between us. But by this last wrong you have broken the bond which bound us; you have made our

union an unholy thing. I will never live with you again. I have borne all things, hoped all things endured all things—but the limit of my endurance is reached. I do not mean a divorce; even if I could avail myself of one, I would scorn to do so; neither is there any need of a formal deed of separation; but our separation will be none the less final and complete. I will make my way in the world alone. From to-night we are dead to one another, you and I. I will never willingly look on your face again.”

There was a great pathos in her voice, though the words came evenly, without any apparent effort. Only once did she falter; it was when she mentioned her child. But she recovered herself in a moment, and went on to the end. Her knees were trembling, and she gripped the mantelpiece more tightly. The reaction was setting in. But Dampier did not heed these signs of emotion. The pathos of her words was lost on him. While she was speaking he sat on the edge of the bed, and swung his legs with an air of ill-assumed indifference. Once or twice he yawned, and he shrugged his shoulders when she spoke of divorce. When she had finished, he

jumped up, and, picking up his portmanteau, moved towards the door.

There he halted for a moment, and turned to look at her. Her head had fallen on her hands. He felt no pity, nothing but impotent rage. The quiet scorn of her words had penetrated even his thick hide.

“That was very well done,” he said with a sneer; “really very well, considering that you are only an amateur. You have evidently rehearsed it. Now the last act is finished, suppose we ring down the curtain. The resolution you have come to entirely agrees with my own. You have exactly anticipated my intentions, and have relieved me of an unpleasant task, and a still more unpleasant responsibility. If I get away, as I hope I shall, you would only have been a drag on me—you have been a drag on me for a long time, in point of fact. We have long since tired of one another; it’s better to end it.” He stopped as if for her to speak, but she said nothing. He went on savagely, irritated by her silence, “I thought you were one of the clinging sort; I see I was mistaken. I am inclined to think that your training in India has not been thrown away. You have had plenty of opportuni-

ties of lining your nest, and, in spite of your damned demure ways, I expect you've done it. Anyway, I haven't interfered, and I shall not interfere in the future. You can go your own way, and I will go mine. Mine lies down the cart road into the plains as fast as my legs will carry me. Yours—I doubt not—is somewhere in the direction of Goring's bungalow, where—”

She raised her head and looked at him; the cowardly insult died away unfinished on his lips. The dumb agony, the reproach in her eyes, silenced him. He felt a sudden twinge of shame, of superstitious dread. In some vague way the look in the woman's eyes called back to him his dead mother.

“Oh, my heart!” she cried, pressing her hands to her side. “How my heart is beating!”

Her strength had ebbed at last. She slid downward to the floor.

He left her without a backward glance, and slunk away into the night.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

A FEW weeks later. The rainy season was drawing to a close, the beginning of the cold weather was at hand, and the exodus from Elysium had already set in. Everywhere one heard of people packing up and departing to the plains, of "leaves" expiring, and of grass-widows returning to their lawful lords. The Elysium Autumn Meeting was over and gone, the *Gymkhana* languished. Soon Elysium would be deserted, the club shut up, the bungalows closed, and everything in a state of suspended animation until the hot weather came round again. From October until April the glory departed from Elysium.

One evening in late September, three men were seated in the smoking-room of the club.

"Well, it's about time to go and dress; I'm dinin' out," yawned a man in the corner, throwing down the *Civil and Military Gazette* which he had been reading.

Just then the door opened, and a man entered.

"Any news, Davenport?" exclaimed Lord Kilkenny lazily; it was he who had made the last remark. "Or, I should say, scandal, for the two things are synonymous?"

"Great news," replied the other, "or, rather, scandal."

"Come, out with it," exclaimed Lord Kilkenny. "I see you are bursting to tell us. Scandal spells either drink, death, or debauchery—which is it?"

"All three combined. I'll tell you when I have had a drink. Try and guess meanwhile."

He touched a small hand-bell on the table by his side, and a khitmagar appeared.

"Bring me a ginger-wine and whisky. I'm deuced fagged, Kilkenny. I've been taking that fiddle-headed brute, Glenmoor, over the jumps. On my way back from the course, I met Probyn of the gunners at the landing-stage, getting out of the tonga—just arrived. He told me the news. Now guess?"

"Well, there's so much knocking about now that it's hard to choose, but I lay my money on the double event. Fresh development in the Dampier business, or something to do with the L'Estrange

filly," replied Lord Kilkenny, knocking the ashes from his cigar.

"You are partly right; you generally are when you lay your money on anything. It's about Dampier. It appears that he was 'cute enough to make his way to Colombo, guessing, no doubt, that they'd be on the lookout for him at Bombay, or Madras, or Calcutta, and he managed to get on board a Homeward-bound P. & O. from Australia. He was not far wrong in his surmises. When the boat arrived at Aden they were on the alert, but the ship's captain reported that one of the second-class passengers had fallen overboard. The police, after searching his kit, stated that there was no doubt Dampier was the missing man. Of course he had carefully disguised himself and all that sort of thing—but, poor devil, he is now in the belly of a shark."

"It's about the best thing that could have happened, for everyone concerned," remarked Lord Kilkenny.

"For the regiment especially," said another man.

"For his wife more so," said a third.

"He was the best hand at billiards I ever knew," said Collins meditatively, from the corner.



"From all one hears, some curious tales would have come out if he had been nailed," said Davenport. "It seems to have been a queer business all round. Have a split, Kilkenny?"

"No, thanks; but I'll have a sherry-and-bitters instead, if I may—yes, a rum business as you say—I should like to know the truth of the affair. Old Bradford, I fancy, could throw a good deal of light on it. There seem to be some very queer rumours flying around about his share in the business. By-the-bye, when do the Bradford-L'Estrange matrimonial stakes come off? It's a fixture, isn't it?"

"Yes, she's caught him at last—on the rebound. Perhaps old Bradford thought it the best way to silence ugly tales. Anyway, they're to be spliced at the beginning of the cold weather, at Calcutta, so I'm told. I met Mrs Potter just now, with Laline, radiant and happy, as they say in fiction. I don't envy her when it comes off. He's a large pill to swallow; he'll want to be very richly gilded. However, I expect she'll know how to take care of herself. Old Bradford 'll have his work cut out to break her into harness. How sick she will be, though, when she hears about Goring, after chuck-

in' him over in the way she did. I hadn't the heart to tell her."

"Goring—what about Goring?"

"I thought it was all over the place, and you would have heard as soon as anyone?" replied Davenport, with a laugh. "He got a cable this morning to tell him that his two cousins—sons of old Sir John Goring, don't you know?—have been drowned, while yachting off the west coast of Ireland. Their yacht capsized, or something of that sort."

"What luck!" exclaimed Lord Kilkenney. "Let's see," he continued reflectively. "Burwood is old Goring's place, if I remember right. Then he'll come into, at least, £7000 a year—lucky devil—heir to a baronetcy and £7000 a year. A bit of a jump from a skipper in a line regiment."

"He's sending in his papers and going Home immediately, I believe. The old man's on his last legs too, so Goring 'll soon come into his kingdom," said Davenport, finishing his peg. "And old Bradford's got wind of it. He's like a bear with a sore head. He hates Goring like the devil hates holy water. They say it's on account of something to do with the Dampier business. Mrs. Dampier—"

"She's all right, I'd bet my bottom dollar. Though

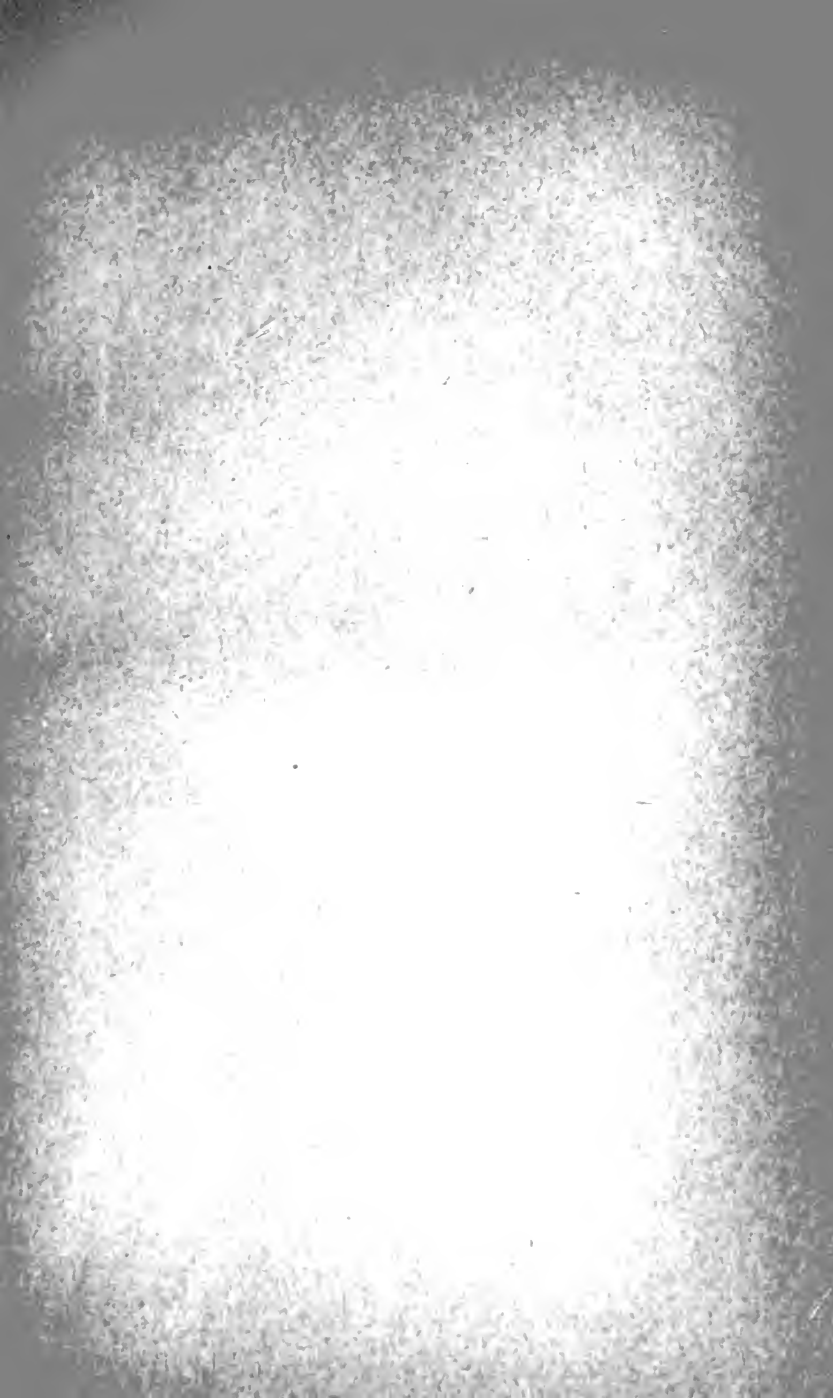
she was mixed up in the affair," broke in Lord Kilkenny, chucking away the end of his cigar, "I'd bet she's as straight as they make 'em, or rather more so. She's gone off with old Lady Fitzpoodle, isn't she?—devilish seedy, I heard, with brain fever—or something of the sort."

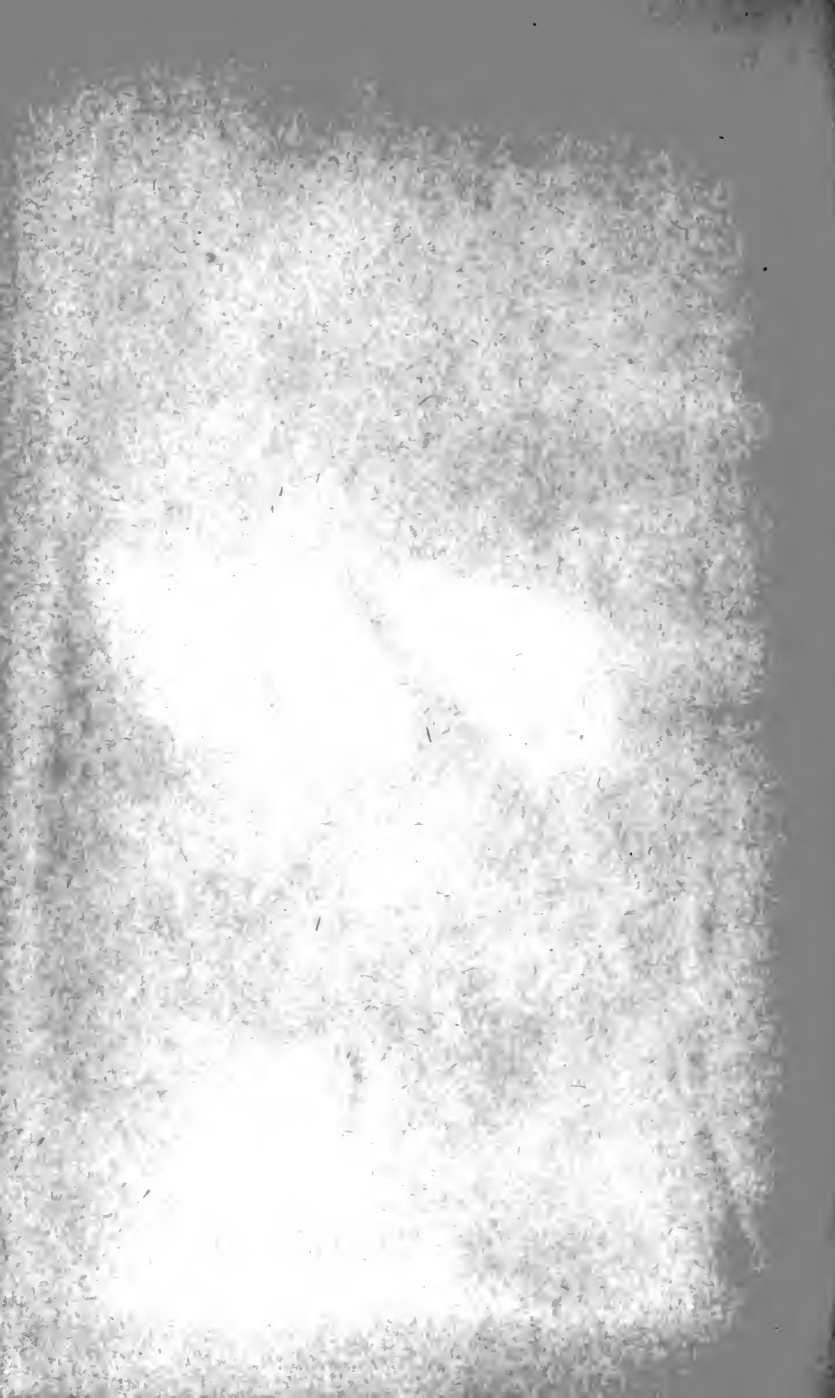
"Yes, I believe she is. Who would have thought Boadicea would have turned up trumps like that? She has behaved like a brick to little Mrs. Dampier. They say she nurses her day and night, and she's a bit long in the tooth now. Well, I suppose it's time to go off and dress; in fact, I'm late as it is," he added, looking at his watch.

"Well, I'm off too," said Lord Kilkenny, jumping up. "Gymkhana to-morrow, I suppose, with the fair Laline as usual to the fore? The last of the season, but she'll be in at the death. I wonder how she'll look? Ta-ta, you chaps; see you to-morrow down on the ground."

END OF VOL. I.









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